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Short Stories

Twice A Month

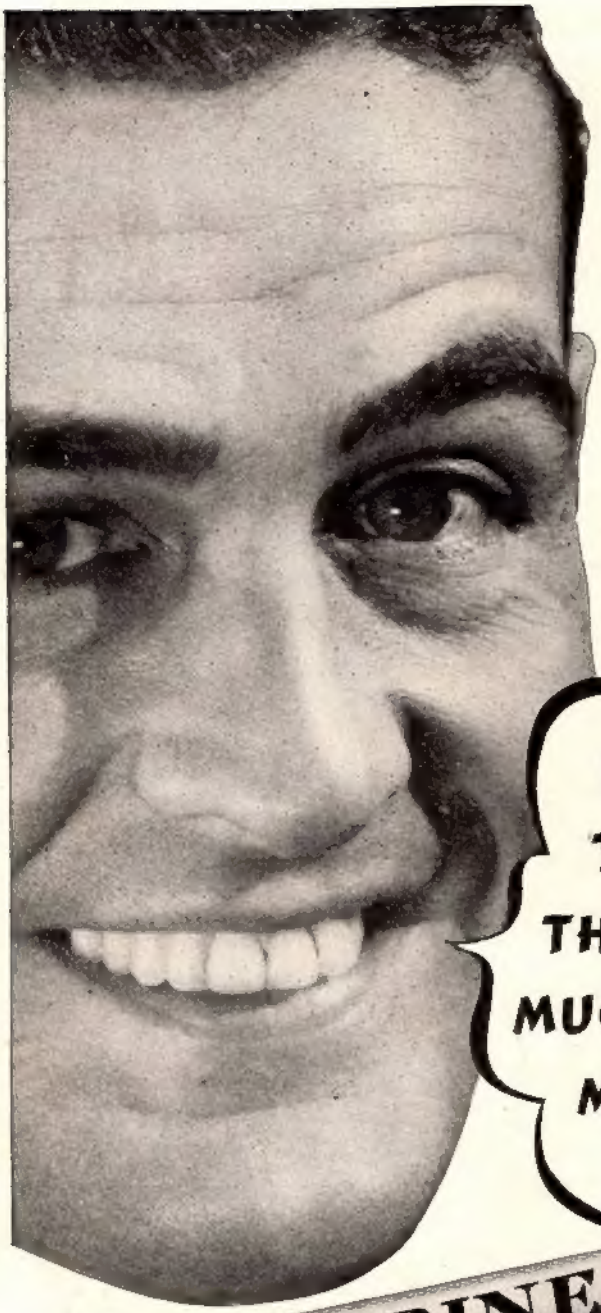
April 10th

I'm a-honin' to lay hands on Old Man Trouble, so ——

FETCH ME A FIGHT!

by

Caddo Cameron



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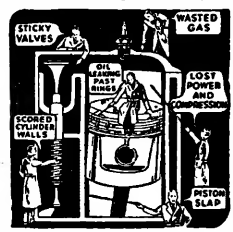

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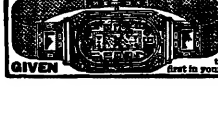

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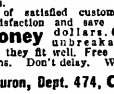

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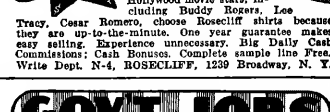

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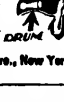

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FETCH ME A FIGHT!

By

CADDO CAMERON

Author of "Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill," "Befo' and After Killin'," etc.

CHAPTER I

"YOU'RE TERRIBLE!"

A PAIR of keen black eyes looked steadily into the open door and front windows of The Texas Loan Company. From beneath the sagging brim of an old Stetson, at a point directly across the main street of Brasada, they stared at President Sam Toller with a peculiar intensity that might have aroused the loan shark's suspicion had he seen them. But he was pleasantly engaged in counting money and computing profits at the close of a day's business, serenely oblivious to everything else.

The eyes were long and narrow and set deep in bony sockets, suggesting physical exhaustion and mental fatigue. Around them was skin the color of the dust that filled its crevices, stretching tightly over a nose that was high and straight and cheeks that were sunken. Black hair streamed down over the man's temples and ears, almost to his shoulders; and a youthful stubble covered his angular jaw and chin, contradicting the impression of age which his face otherwise gave.

His long back was bent and his wide shoulders drooped, as he sat coiled down on the porch of The Brasada General Store; and at points where his bones were not covered by corded muscles, they seemed ready to cut through his skin and clothing. A rip in his faded shirt sleeve exposed a gash in the flesh beneath it—neglected, inflamed, and festered. His old bullhide chaps were jagged and scratched, his vest was torn up the back to a point between his shoulder blades, and his boots were shapeless and cracked and badly run over at the heels. He sat like a man who —having gone that far, could go no fur-

Black Jack Opined that Old Man Trouble Was on His Way, A-Fetchin' Plenty Help Along

ther; a man too young to be so utterly worn out.

To a casual observer, Tom Carlin might have appeared to be resting or perhaps dozing, unconscious of the life moving around him. But his eyes roamed restlessly beneath the hat brim, and few things escaped their notice. Two girls and a pair of cowhands about his age came laughing onto the porch. Their chatter broke off suddenly, and he felt their eyes upon him; and as they went into the store, he overheard their cautious remarks about his rags and bones.

Little muscles crawled beneath the stubble on his jaw, and he gazed even more intently at the loan shark's den across the street.

But he didn't blame the girls or the hands. Tom Carlin—for the past year, half owner of the little TP outfit—didn't look much like "Black Jack" the sporty gunfighter, known for miles along the border as a dandy who wore the best clothing and rode the finest rigging that money could buy.

His eyes again found the door across the street.

Sam Toller and his spindling clerk were handling money, what looked like heaps of money to Tom; gold he imagined, and silver of course, and maybe some paper. Big Sam.

Folks said he had corralled most of that part of Texas and was rounding up the balance.

Tom Carlin stropped a bowie knife on the leg of his chaps and stared at the man who had made his life a hell for months; the man whose riders had stolen his stock and murdered his hands; the man who engineered the death of his old pardner, and was now in a fair way to grab all that remained of the TP.

The knife stopped in the middle of a stroke.

Sleek and well fed and overflowing his chair, Toller sat back comfortably and lit a fat cigar. Across the street, in the fingers of the lean and ragged man—the blade flashed as it turned from side to side, resuming its monotonous sweep.

The TP signified the death of Black Jack, Tom's first serious attempt to settle down. He put all he had into the effort. Savings, enthusiasm of his youth, his strength, his heart, and his very soul—all went into the TP; for it was a perfect little layout, just the thing to set a young fellow to dreamin' of a home and a wife and some young'ns, and——

The bony fingers gripped tighter, and the knife moved faster.

Two beefy men with badges pinned on their silk shirts, strolled down the opposite sidewalk and called a greeting to Sam Toller. Deputies, but where was Marshal Ranse Dakin? Scarcely turning his head, Tom looked carefully up and down both sides of the narrow street. This being his first visit to Brasada, he had never seen Dakin; but he'd know the man, regardless. Ranse Dakin had killed his pardner; shot Dad Gannon upon the pretext that the harmless old man was resisting arrest. And the marshal and his deputies were known to be Toller's men.

TOM abandoned the search, and again centered his gaze upon the open door and windows across the street.

He saw the clerk gather up an armful of books and go through a door at the rear, no doubt a private office. Fixing to close up, all right. Tom's glance shifted quickly to his horse, a tall sorrel, dozing at the rack on the opposite side of the street near the loan office. A hundred feet down the sidewalk, the two deputies tarried on the porch of The Rio Grande Dance Hall in lively conversation with some girls.

"Where in hell is Dakin?" thought Tom.

He arose stiffly, returned the knife to its scabbard, hitched up his belt, and touched briefly the handle of the gun that hung in an old holster tied down on his right thigh. Pulling his hat lower over his forehead, he again looked carefully along the sidewalks and shot a glance into the store behind him. Then he clumped to the edge of the porch and lounged against a post: a tall, broad figure hung with rags; a raw-boned two hundred pounder ridden down to a hundred eighty pounds of tough manhood.

For a long moment he stood there, gazing at the door across the street like a man contemplating a job that had to be done, and without the energy to undertake it. Toller folded his arms and puffed smoke at the ceiling; Tom Carlin stepped down into the street and went toward the sorrel. His feet were heavy, his clothes itched and scratched to remind him that he'd been in them a week, and his bones ached to recall days in the saddle; but he strode on with a fixed purpose apparent in his movements.

Unhurriedly he smoothed and straightened the saddle blanket and tightened his cinches. Drawing a Winchester from its scabbard beneath the fender, he slid some cartridges into its magazine. In the meantime, he contrived to examine the street from one end to the other. Plenty of folks in sight, but Dakin wasn't among 'em. The deputies seemed to be doing right well and plumb satisfied to stay where they were.

A girl left Bud Simmons' restaurant next door to The Rio Grande and walked hastily along the sidewalk toward him, carrying a small but obviously heavy buckskin bag.

"Damn the luck!" thought Tom. "I'll betcha she's a-headin' for Toller's."

A pair of large hazel eyes sent him a casual glance as she went by, and he momentarily forgot how she might be fixing to snarl his plans. Tom hadn't seen many girls in the past year, none like her.

Mighty purty hair; figgered a fella would call it bay. Her head would top his shoulder, and she shore carried it like a thoroughbred. Always did like a tall gal, 'specially if she was packin' the weight to go with it and set her heels down like she meant it when she walked. Cute chin—no foolin'; but from the shape of it he calc'lated she might be sorta hard mouthed.

AT THE threshold of the loan office, she paused and glanced over her shoulder at him. That gal didn't grin. Hell no! Jest a-seein' things. Tom was still looking when the door closed behind her.

Thinking maybe she wouldn't stay long, he killed time fussing with his saddlebags and the old ducking coat tied behind the cantle. But no one came out of Toller's. Evidently the place was closed for the day, for he saw a man try the door and walk away.

"Daggone that there gal!" reflected Tom.

Then he set his jaw and swore he'd finish the job, regardless. Outside he remained Tom Carlin, a ragged and weary cowman; but, inside, once more he was Black Jack—a wild, devil-may-care fighting man of the border country.

Ambling down the sidewalk onto the loan office porch, he saw that the front room was empty and made his way quickly toward the rear. While passing along the side of the building in full view, he imagined a dozen pairs of eyes boring into his back. Must be gittin' sorta spooky. Let 'em look, damn 'em! He walked more slowly.

The door swung open in answer to his sharp knock, and Tom went through at a stride—gun in hand. A slender young man with a weak chin and calf eyes, let go the knob and stumbled backward to a table. The girl sat unmoved in a chair facing the door. At a desk on the left, Sam Toller acted with rare presence of mind. With no perceptible delay, his left hand grasped the lapel of his coat and his right dived beneath it.

"H'ist 'em!" growled Tom in a low voice.

Toller hesitated for an instant as though measuring his chances, then lifted his hands shoulder high. This was Tom's first meeting with the man who had all but ruined him. With a species of stern curiosity, he examined the loan shark's round, high-colored face; a peculiarly hard face that seemed all muscle and no fat.

The cowman kicked the door shut behind him. He saw at a glance that Toller was a fighter, and was careful to keep the man covered. A ticklish situation, and for an instant he wondered what to do next. The clerk half sat and leaned against the table, too scared to move or make a sound; but the girl was a different proposition. Apparently not at all upset by what was taking place, she had a queer gleam in her eye which looked more like deviltry than anything else.

Without removing his glance from Toller, Tom said to her, "Just one leetle squawk, Miss, and I'll gag you a-plenty."

She answered quite calmly, "I'm not the squawkin' kind, Mister Outlaw."

"Sorta cale'lated you wa'n't," he said, "but it pays to make shore."

The loan shark's wild temper robbed him of speech. His throat worked, and hard muscles showed beneath the ruddy skin of his face.

"Git up!" commanded Tom.

The big man made no move to obey, and Carlin took a quick step toward him. This threatening action startled the clerk. He tried to slip around the table, and his coat swept an ink bottle to the floor. Tom's attention wavered. Toller jerked to his

feet, and his hand again darted beneath his coat.

From the corner of his eye, the cowman saw the movement in ample time to fire; but a sudden impulse stopped him. Perhaps subconsciously he thought, "Rip the big devil apart!" In that brief instant the gunfighter became a savage ignorant of guns; a savage inflamed by a rage that demanded a killing by physical conflict—death at close range.

He struck with the barrel of the gun as though it were a primitive club. He saw the steel crush its way through a cheek and lips, and his hand tingled to the feel of it.

He scarcely noticed the Colt in Toller's fist, flung up to ward off a second blow that fell with lightening speed. He saw his barrel plunge through heavy, bristling hair and bite into the scalp beneath it. The handle twisted in his palm, the jar shocked his wrist, and a pleasing thrill raced up his arm; a glancing blow that stopped with a crunch on the bones of a bulky shoulder.

THE loan shark's thick legs crumpled and he fell heavily. Breathing rapidly, Tom Carlin looked on with mingled feelings of satisfaction and disappointment. A dose of his own medicine, damn his soul! But he wasn't dead. Wasn't even hurt bad. The savage cried out, "Strangle him! He'd strangle you." But the gunfighter wouldn't listen to it.

"God, you're terrible!" The girl's voice, low and a bit unsteady.

Tom pulled his eyes away from the body at his feet. Turning to her, he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror on the wall above the wash stand.

"Reckon you're dead right, Miss," he admitted gruffly.

Looking sternly at the clerk who had wilted into a chair by the table, he commanded, "Count me out two thousand in greenbacks and make 'aste 'bout it."

The young fellow squirmed, fumbling at his collar and trying to avoid Tom's hard stare.

"Git movin'!" growled the cowman. "I ain't got no time to waste."

"Better mind him, Chester," quietly remarked the girl. She had a trick of lifting one eyebrow and looking at a fellow out of the corner of that particular eye. "I think he's a lunatic."

The clerk made for the open safe, and Tom grinned dryly down at her. "Much obliged, Miss. Mebbe you kept me from having to crimp a gun bar'l over his head."

She crossed her knees and dangled a foot. "I meant it. You are crazy."

"I've knowed it for quite a spell, but how'd you ever guess it?"

She glanced down at Toller who lay like a dead man, and over at Chester who was nervously stacking currency in untidy piles. "The last man who tried to pull off a robbery in Brasada was shot to pieces before he got out of town."

That was no news to him. He knew these Brasada marshals were bad.

Tom looked thoughtfully down at her for a moment. Purty as a picture, and nervy as all git out. His hard eyes softened, and his lips tried to smile. "I shore hate to tie you, Miss, but I reckon they ain't no way out of it."

Her chin came up a trifle, and for the first time he saw a flash of anger in her eyes; honest-to-goodness wrath that brought more color to her smooth cheeks and strong, round throat. He sort of held his breath.

"Are you a Texas man?" she inquired coldly.

"Plumb through and through."

"And you're going to tie a woman like you would a steer?"

He stiffened, but met her fiery glance without turning a hair. "When a fella's takin' chances jerkin' the slack out'n a rope, Miss, he's likely to do a whole slew of things that goes against the grain."

She looked away quickly, and said nothing.

Keeping one eye on the clerk, Tom took a roller towel from the wall and tore it in pieces. He noticed that she now followed every move, and he half expected her to make a dash for the door.

Returning to where she sat, he told her a bit wistfully, "Don't you make no ruckus, Miss, and I won't hurt you none. Jest poke yo' hands through the back of yo' cheer and set steady in the saddle."

For a moment she hesitated with fingers clenched in her lap, breathing rapidly and looking him in the eye. His face went suddenly hard. She put her hands through the back of the chair.

Chester finished counting the money, and Tom bound him with no loss of time.

Placing the currency inside of his shirt, he turned to the girl and regarded her with an almost pleading expression. "I'd a heap ruther take a lickin' than to gag you, Miss." He dropped his eyes to his bony fingers—broken nails and callouses, and continued with quiet courtesy, "Jest you gimme yo' word that you won't do no squallin' for thirty minutes, and I'll shore trust you."

She kept silent for a moment. Her eyes roved over him from head to foot in a searching stare that made him uncomfortable, although there was nothing unfriendly about it.

Presently she inquired in a low voice, "I know it's a fool question, but what's your name?"

A fool question, sure enough—thought Tom; and he was a damned fool to answer it truthfully. But he didn't feel like lying to this girl; and besides, neither she nor the clerk would believe him.

So he grinned and replied, "If you'll jest holler for Black Jack, Miss, I'll come a-runnin'."

Her eyes opened wide and as quickly contracted. "I've heard lots of stories about Black Jack, all of 'em good. I'll give you my word."

Tom's care-worn face momentarily flushed with pleasure. Turning on the clerk he said harshly, "This here gal is makin' a promise so's to keep my dirty hands off'n her. She's the kind that won't break her word, and if I ever hear tell that you let a peep out'n you 'bout it I'll come plumb all the way back from hell to salivate you—so help me!"

He walked quickly to the back door and paused at the threshold. A surprisingly boyish smile appeared suddenly through the hard lines that made his face old. "So 'long, Miss."

Damned if she didn't smile right back.

"So 'long, Black Jack. Take care of yourself."

Chapter II

A LONESOME LOBO WITH A BOUNTY ON HIS PELT

THE sorrel awoke at the sound of his leisurely footsteps on the board sidewalk. It sleepily rolled an eye and flicked an ear at him; but the instant he spoke, its head went up and it showed signs of wanting to go away from there. Tom might deceive the human beings around him, but his horse discovered the excitement that boiled within him. Every second was precious, and he was dying to swing into the saddle and leave town in a cloud of dust; but saner judgment told him it wasn't the thing to do. He'd have to ride quietly away, the direction of his going unnoticed if possible.

As he was placing the money in a saddle bag, three drunken cowhands came weaving down the sidewalk. He turned his back, but luck was running against him. Recognizing him for what he was, one of the hands sang out, "What's your hurry, you stove-up old cactus boomer?"

Cursing under his breath, Tom nevertheless answered civilly. It would be fatal to attract undue attention to himself, so he was forced to expend valuable time in getting away without arousing their alcoholic ire.

At length he rode slowly along the street, expecting at any moment to hear

yells announcing the discovery of the robbery. The sorrel tossed its head, tongued the bit, and planted its hooves down hard. Tom set the muscles of his neck to keep from looking back at Toller's. The girl's words ran through his mind with devilish persistence—"shot to pieces before he got out of town—shot to pieces—shot to pieces—" Up and down his spine, the skin crawled. The most innocent sounds were translated into warning signals by his apprehensive ears. Nerves that had been alternately stupefied and raw for weeks, now united to lift a frantic voice within him demanding that he fly. He clamped his jaws and rode at an even slower pace.

But from Toller's to the edge of town was the longest ride Tom Carlin ever made.

When Brasada lay behind him, he put the rangy sorrel into a long lope. A dark line on the eastern horizon seemed to beckon him; brush, which he observed at a distance while reconnoitering the town that morning. If he reached it they'd never catch him, for he'd gamble there wasn't a horse in Texas that could tear through brush as fast as his sorrel.

Topping a gentle rise fifteen minutes later, he slowed down to let his mount breathe. A glance over his shoulder was followed by a disgusted oath. Coming toward him was a stream of dust that shot along close to the earth, then rose in a wavering yellow column to be swept away by the wind. Somebody had stumbled onto the robbery, and someone remembered having seen him ride away. It never occurred to Tom to think that the girl had broken her word.

He brought the impatient sorrel to a stop, and strained his eyes looking into the sun in an effort to estimate the size and speed of the approaching posse. As the dust boiled along toward him, the burden of weariness that he had so long carried suddenly descended upon him. The old saddle that was so perfectly shaped to him, developed sharp knobs and ridges that galled his skin and bruised his flesh. His bony body drooped in its rags, and the setting sun cast shadows across the hollows in his cheeks.

Eternally chasin' or gittin' chased. A-ridin' and a-fightin', and a-fightin' and a-workin'. Godamighty! He could sleep for a week.

HE LET the sorrel out to a gallop. The creak of leather, the surge of mighty muscles and the pounding of a stout heart between his knees, and the whistle of the wind past his ears combined to restore his fighting spirits. In spite of all hell, he'd give 'em the slip and finish what he started!

Level, treeless prairie stretched out before him; ground that was filled with holes and dangerous going for a brush horse, deficient in that peculiar sense which enables a plains animal to run hell bent through all manner of holes in safety. The sorrel was more than willing to take chances, but Tom slowed it down. The posse rapidly climbed up on him, and he soon made out the plunging figures beneath the dust. A whole slew of 'em, and they shore was a-ridin'.

Suddenly there came a sound with which he was thoroughly familiar, the spiteful whine of a bullet overhead. Another plunked into a prairie dog mound on his left, bit at the hard-packed earth, and ricochetted onward. He continued at an easy lope. A scattered swarm of bullets sped past, or zipped into the grass, and jets of dust darted up on either side. The sorrel lengthened its stride, but he reined it down to a cautious gait. The posse worked its rifles in earnest and lead split the air uncomfortably near at hand; but

a short distance ahead crouched the brush, a murderous ten-foot barrier, armed to the teeth with thorns and daggers.

However, a moment later it seemed to Tom that the brush was a long ways off. A bullet jerked at his vest under his arm and sped on to burn a furrow along the side of the sorrel's neck. The horse leaped wildly, heedless of the holes that opened their jaws to receive a reckless foot. Its hoof caught a pile of fresh earth at a badger hole, it lurched and stumbled over a dog mound, and went down. Tom fell clear and landed rolling, unhurt. The animal got to its feet almost as quickly as he, and apparently it too was uninjured. As he leaped into the saddle, it appeared to him that the posse was terribly close. The sorrel took half a dozen labored, awkward lunges and he knew he was in for it; a strained shoulder, more than likely.

Damned if he'd cripple the horse any worse than it was!

Whipping out his Winchester, he sprang to the ground, jerked off his bridle, slapped the sorrel with the reins, and dropped into the short grass. Lying prone and aiming with the care of a man shooting at a mark, he brought down two ponies before the leading riders realized what was taking place. He deliberately shot at their horses, having nothing against the men themselves if Ranse Dakin wasn't one of them; and he couldn't distinguish the marshal at that distance. The posse tore up the ground, they stopped so suddenly.

Tom got to his feet and set out on a zig-zagging run for the brush. Bullets whistled all around him, but the range was too great for anything like accurate shooting at a dodging, twisting object as small as a man.

He darted into a tangle of thorny vegetation and faced about. Simply had to hold this gang off until darkness enabled him to slip away somehow, and double back toward the TP range, many miles southwest of Brasada. He heard the sorrel making its way through the brush a short distance to the right.

The posse had ventured no nearer, and apparently was holding a consultation. In a few moments the group broke up, and Tom had the wild thought that the chase was over; but he quickly concluded it was just commencing in earnest. One rider set off towards town at a fast gallop and others streamed out to right and left, forming a line of widely spaced men fronting the brush. Instantly he was struck by the fear that he might have holed up in a comparatively small patch of brush, not knowing the country.

"Damned if they ain't fixin' to comb this here bresh or circle it, shore as hell!" he growled to himself. "This ain't no place for me." He turned back into the brush to find his horse.

"Whoa-a-a-up, stranger!" came a deep, mellow voice that nevertheless carried a note of command. "You're damned shore to snag yo' panties if you don't take it sorta easy."

Tom stopped in mid stride and spun around, hand at his holster. Grinning at him through a screen of mesquite, wild currant and cactus, was a black-bearded face and the thick muzzle of a Sharp's .50.

He thought of the money in his saddle bags. A chill ran up his spine. By God, he'd make a fight for it!

He must have advertised his intentions, for a deep chuckle in the bushes was followed by, "Now don't git in a lather! Cain't you noways take a joke?"

LOOKING more carefully, Tom made out a mouthful of teeth against a background of dark, curly beard, and a pair of humorous eyes that danced beneath bushy, overhanging brows. A jolly face, but the muzzle of the rifle looked mighty steady and serious.

"Reckon I can take a joke all right," dryly answered the cowman, "but squintin' down the throat of a buffalo gun ain't no joke in my country."

Another chuckle and a commotion arose in the bushes, followed by the appearance of a man who was short and extremely broad. His bowed legs were covered by old chaps and his long arms were thrust through the remnants of a vest that exposed a chest like a gorrilla's. Slanted at a jaunty angle on a curly mass of hair, was a shapeless old Stetson with a strip of rawhide laced through the outer edge of its brim. Tom instantly branded the stranger as an old timer, one of those men who had been every place and done everything and probably wasn't a day over forty-five.

The big man put out a hairy paw. "Shake, fella. Moonshine is the name."

Tom gripped the paw. "Right handy name, I'd say," he drawled. "Betcha you don't have no trouble rememberin' it. Some folks call me Black Jack."

Moonshine's grin threatened to split his face, and he slapped Tom on the shoulder with force enough to stagger the average man. "I allow that ain't what they're a-callin' you in Brasada," he boomed heartily. "D'you reckon 'tis?"

"Nope," admitted Tom, but he offered no further explanation. "If it's all the same to you, I allow I'd better see can I ketch my nag befo' he gits hisself plumb lost."

"Shore! But he cain't git lost none to speak of in this here bresh."

"How come?"

The broad fellow had the look of a man thoroughly enjoying a joke on someone else. "'Cause it's jest a lettle dab, and I know it better'n I know my own whiskers. Right now you got a hundred-foot canyon full of Texas air on three sides of you, and a prairie full of posse on t'other."

Tom's heart stumbled; but he kept a stony face and remarked in off-hand fashion, "Is that a fact?"

MOONSHINE planted his feet wide and teetered back on his run-over heels. "Yes sah-ree, young fella. So I reckon you might meet up with yo' friends back yander befo' long. 'Pears to me they'll shore be powerful glad to see you."

"Huh! Them coyotes ain't no friends of mine," grunted the cowman. Wise in the ways of these old timers, he went on to say, "And I'll jest gamble a stack of blues that you got the same idees about 'em."

Moonshine's wide shoulders heaved with mirth. "Black Jack, you done hit 'er plumb center fust shot! Them lady-killin' law men is my favoryte meat. Fact is, I seen the time when I was a mite hongry and gobbled up half a dozen of 'em at one settin'."

Tom laughed for the first time in days. He had to laugh. This jovial bandit radiated a contagious disregard for things serious; one of those men who go through life finding amusement in every experience, and die poking fun at their predicament.

"Wish to hell you'd gobble up a passel of marshals," remarked the young man, "while I sorta untangle myself from this here bresh."

"They ain't a damned thing I'd ruther do," admitted the old timer, "but you ain't noways tangled. I was sorta funnin' with you to see you'd take it. If a critter ain't got wings, they's jest one trail that'll git him to the bottom of the canyon—kinda like bustin' head fust through a rat hole when you know where's the rat hole, and I do. Fork yo' pony and beat 'em to the hole. I'll tell you how to git there. Better make 'aste 'bout it, too."

Tom heaved a sigh. "Reckon you got here too late to see that I got me a crippled hoss on my hands," and he told about the fall.

Moonshine swore sympathetically, and they went to look for the horse. Not far away it was nibbling the leaves of a huajilla and obviously favoring its off foreleg.

The cowman eagerly examined the leg and shoulder, and concluded it was a case of strain which might or might not respond

to such treatment as he could give it in the short time he'd have to work on it. Offhand he figured he wasn't definitely afoot. Once clear of the posse, the sorrel could make it to some friendly outfit by going slowly. But it would take hard riding to get free of the brush and away before the trail was blocked, and that was out of the question. Gazing somberly at the crippled horse, he suddenly turned his rage loose in a string of curses. He couldn't help it. With his nerves raw and his body tired to the bone, this last misfortune hurt like hell.

A heavy hand on his shoulder and a hearty voice in his ear, ended the outburst. "Boy—yo' profanity is a honah to yo' ancestors, if you got any of them things. But cussin' won't noways git you out'n this here jackpot. Now lemme see. I got me a mule, and you can——"

Tom's dark face brightened. Nevertheless, he quickly interrupted. "Much obliged, old timer. But I ain't the kind of a jasper that'll go off and leave a fella afoot in the bresh. Reckon I'll manage to git along somehow."

For a moment, Moonshine regarded the younger man with a twinkle in his eye. "Well-l-l, let's do a leetle figgerin'," he mused. "If wuss comes to wuss, you can snare one of these here peccaries and slap yo' hull on him. If you cinch her up damned good'n tight and hang on tooth and toenail to keep the critter from runnin' clean out from under you, I'll bet my bottom dollar you can ride that there hog plumb to the Rio Grandy and never stop to feed or water."

Again Tom laughed, thinking that this big scalawag wouldn't let a man stay in a bad humor very long. "That's a idee, shore enough. I done rode mighty nigh everything but hogs, and I'd sorta like to tackle one of 'em. Reckon it'd be a heap more fun than tryin' to hold off that there posse when they start combin' the bresh for me."

"Huh! Them polecats don't aim to do no combin'."

"What makes you think that?"

Moonshine chuckled from the waist up. "In the fust place, you done let on that you're right handy with a Winchester. And in the second place, they know you got a crippled hoss, so they're dead sartin they can ketch you without takin' no fool chances."

TOM took off his hat and ran thoughtful fingers through his long, black hair. More than likely the old timer was right. Better do what he could for the sorrel, and wait for night and see what turned up. Furthermore, he felt that the big fellow had taken a liking to him so it wouldn't do any harm to get better acquainted. Right now, he could use a little help.

After stating that he was going to take a peek at the posse, and being ridiculed for the suggestion, he changed the subject to inquire about water for bathing the sorrel's shoulder and leg.

"Plenty water and big feed! Foller me," boomed Moonshine. Starting away with the proprietary stride of a genial host showing a guest over his domain he swung his arm in an expansive gesture that included all the surrounding country. "Jest make yo'self to home, Black Jack, and squall for anything you want and cain't steal."

Tom placed a detaining hand on his arm. "Course I ain't got no business askin' questions, but I'd kinda like to know whether you forted up here to save yo' hair. Understand they's no hard feelin's if you want to keep mum."

Grinning from ear to ear, Moonshine stopped and answered with robust frankness. "Me—I ain't got no secrets from man or beast, young fella. You might say my life is a open book. When I was a five-year-old, or mebbe jest a long fo', my mammy tarned me out to graze and she plumb forgot to hobble me. I up and lit out for tough country, and from that day to this'n I been a-scratchin' gravel to save my hide, and a-fortin' up off-an-on to keep

from losin' my hair. From Maine to Californy, they ain't a blasted sheriff that don't lick his chops every time he thinks of Moonshine; and if the pesky Rangers ever lay hands on me, they can pay off Old Texas' debts with the rewards they'll gether."

He dropped the Sharp's into the crook

of his arm and again started off, adding over his shoulder, "Yes sah, Black Jack, I'm a lonesome lobo with a bounty on my pelt and I'm powerful tickled to have company—not wishin' you any tough luck."

Tom followed, leading his horse and laughing to himself. He had to admit that the situation looked bad, but Moonshine gave him no chance to worry over his difficulties. Keeping up a running fire of banter and amusing stories, the old timer conducted his visitor deeper into the brush—eventually arriving at a crude wickiup that squatted in a small opening surrounded by an almost impenetrable growth of thorny vegetation. Near at hand a tiny spring trickled from beneath some rocks, its clear waters wandering leisurely away to lose themselves in the brush. A gaunt, bay mule of huge proportions and wicked countenance was tied to a convenient mesquite.

Moonshine jerked a thumb at the beast. "Better keep yo' pony plumb away from that there mule, 'cause he's a blood-thirsty killer. They's a bounty on his ears in mighty nigh every county in Texas."

Tom solemnly inspected the mule. "Damned if he ain't got a bad eye."

"Bad eye—hell! He's bad all over, and his name is Leetle Angel."

While the cowman did what he could for his horse, Moonshine got together a mighty meal with a minimum of smoke and a maximum of picturesque profanity. He would upset something or burn himself and cuss a blue streak; then in no time he'd cool off and laugh from head to heels.

Listening with one ear and watching from the corner of his eye, Tom carefully sized him up and at length reflected, "Big talker, laugher, liar, eater, and fighter; and big-hearted to boot."

AFTER the meal, they stretched on the ground to smoke. Punctuated by bursts of laughter, Moonshine's resonant voice rumbled on; the voice of a man hungry for companionship and trying hard to entertain a chance visitor. Having little to say, Tom listened and rested and enjoyed every minute of it, since he was convinced there was nothing to fear from the posse for the time being. He gathered that the big outlaw had been hiding out in the brush for quite a while, waiting for some particular happening; but he got no inkling of what this was. Although a stranger in Brasada, Moonshine claimed to have explored the country for miles around and to know every inch of it.

Suddenly the old timer stopped in the middle of an anecdote and peered at Tom across the bowl of the old corncob that thrust itself out of his beard. "Say looky here, Black Jack! By dogies! I been watchin' you and you ain't as much as wiggled a leetle finger in the last ten minutes. Boy, you're plumb petered out!"

"I *am* sorta tired, but not enough to speak of."

Moonshine snorted and sat up quickly. "Sorta—hell! Yo' flanks is holler and yo' bones is a-rattlin' and yo' skin is a-stickin' to 'em. What you need is sleep. Crawl into my blankets yander. Jest you lemme take keer of any posse that comes a-nosin' 'round. Ain't had me a ruckus in days, and I'm shore a-hornin' for one. Don't argy! Git goin'!"

That did it.

Before Tom realized what he was say-

ing, his troubles were pouring into the older man's sympathetic ear. He described the little TP outfit as it was a year ago; a fine range with valuable all-year water, 2,500 head in the iron, a hundred or more first-rate ponies in the remuda, and a square old pardner whose riding days were over but whose knowledge of cows was the equal of any in Texas. He told how the powerful Double L undertook to buy the TP for a fraction of its worth and failing in this, set out to drive them off the range. And he bitterly declared that, while the Double L was operated and ostensibly owned by Jose Rancon, the actual owner of the crooked outfit was Sam Toller.

Moonshine let out a burst of lurid profanity.

In a tired voice Tom went on to describe their desperate fight for existence, a battle against superior forces who practiced all the devilment known to the cow country. He told how Dad Gannon had borrowed $250 from Sam Toller before they learned of his connection with the Double L, and how the note had mysteriously grown to $2,250 when Dad returned to Brasada to pay off the original amount.

The young man's naturally resonant tones became hard and metallic as he described Dad Gannon's death at the hands of Ranse Dakin. The killing occurred in Toller's office when the old man paid the $250 and raised a fuss about the balance.

The big outlaw made strange noises deep in his chest.

Tom crushed out his cigarette and lapsed into a moody silence. He wondered whatever possessed him to unburden himself to this stranger, a man who frankly admitted that law and order were poison to him. But there was something about the burly ruffian to drag confidences from an honest man.

THE cowman went on with his story. He told how he had learned through a spy that the Double L was putting up a big herd to be shoved onto the TP range. From a point fifty miles distant, this herd would be trailed in by a crew of fighting cowhands, arriving about the time the forged note fell due. That would mean the end of the TP.

For once Moonshine was silent. Hugging his knees, he stared at the ashes of their cooking fire and occasionally puffed at a cold pipe.

After a short pause, Tom briefly described the robbery and his flight from Brasada. He concluded in a colorless voice, "And I wish to God I'd killed him."

The big outlaw came alive and slapped him on the thigh with a hand like a side of bacon. "Boy—you're jest the kind of a ring-tailed wildcat I'll back until hell freezes solid and the devils pack earmuffs!"

Tom's throat tightened momentarily. Ashamed of himself, he wouldn't trust his voice. Might've known Moonshine would back him. He knew the breed; generous fellows whose sympathies were easily aroused; and grand fighters who plunged into a fight for the fun of the thing, not caring a damn what it was about.

The young man got stiffly to his feet and offered his hand. "Much obliged, old timer, but I don't want to put you out none. Reckon I'll manage to git along."

Tom thought his arm would be jerked from its socket, and the fist that thumped him on the chest was as hard as the hind hoof of a mule.

"Hush yo' mouth, slick-ear!" bellowed Moonshine. "Don't you gimme no argyment and git me riled, 'cause I might sqush you. Jest show me the skunk you're a-hankerin' to salivate, and our squaws'll be dancin' his scalp come mawnin'.

Tom mentally felt himself over for broken bones, and sort of fitted his joints back together. "That there Double L herd has got to be stopped, but I'm in a hell of a fix to do it—corraled here with a hoss that cain't no more'n trot."

The old timer cocked his head to one side. "If we was shed of this here posse,

could we git there in time with yo' stove-up old crowbait?"

"Shore we could. My sorrel can hit the trail, but right now he cain't run no faster than yo' flea-bitten donkey."

"Bully!" chuckled Moonshine. "Then you can jest figger them Double L cows is due to git stopped a-plenty." Picking up the skillet, he poured the remaining coffee and grounds onto the ashes. Let's ramble."

AN HOUR later they dismounted a short distance in from the eastern edge of the brush. Moonshine declared that the trail leading down into the canyon was directly ahead, and that he knew exactly where to look for the guard or guards—as the case might be. Although strictly business, he went about his preparations with the enthusiasm of a boy fixing to play a prank on some unsuspecting person.

"Leather leggin's and a Stetson ain't no good fixin's for scoutin' in the bresh. 'cause you can hear 'em a mile away," he rumbled softly, and off they came. "Feet wa'n't made for boots nohow," and off came the boots to be replaced by moccasins from his saddle bags. After tying a bandana around his head to hide the white skin of his forehead, he squared his tremendous shoulders, drew a long breath, and declared, "Now I feel like a man."

Glancing at the full moon which had peeped over the brush, he drew a bowie knife and tenderly tried its edge with a stubby finger. "I most generally make it a pint to do my killin' with a gun when it's light of the moon, and save Leetle Helpmeet here for dark nights. But I reckon it won't do no harm to bust my rule jest once, so we'll see can we carve us a way out'n this here corral."

Tom was in a quandary. Everything depended upon his getting clear of the brush. With a crippled horse, he couldn't shoot his way out and make a run for it. The trail had to be cleared with as little noise as possible—a mean, dangerous job which Moonshine could handle much better than he. But this was his fight, and he said as much.

The old timer answered in a fierce whisper. "The hell it's yo' fight. *Any* fight is my fight!"

"But they may be half a dozen of 'em and——"

Moonshine impatiently shook his head. "Nope. Not more'n two. Balance of 'em will be watchin' the open country. You stick right here until a whip-poor-will bellers three times, then come ahead and be damned keerful how you handle that there mule."

He returned the knife to its scabbard with a little flourish. "Boy—this is jest a picnic for the fella that showed them thievin' Pawnees how to steal a pony, and larned them cussed Apaches all they know 'bout the sheddin' of innercent blood."

With that he left, disappearing in the brush as silently as a shadow.

A procession of minutes loitered past. Tom listened and fidgeted and cussed himself. Letting another man do his fighting! Then he thought of the stakes, and had to admit that it was the smart thing to do.

Even the horse and mule were listening—heads up, ears flirting forward and back, and moonlight glistening on their eyeballs. Tom clenched his jaws until his teeth hurt, and strained his ears. His frayed nerves were jumpy. The roistering night life of the brush sent up its tiny sounds of revelry, and in them he heard tales of slaughter. A frolicking pack rat squealed, and he imagined an owl had it. The odor of a skunk floated in on the breeze, and he saw a bird's nest invaded and the young birds murdered. A fawn sprang into a nearby opening, bouncing high out of sheer joy, and he pictured a panther skulking in the shadows. In the distance arose the bugle note of a wolf, and he saw the bloody carcass of a new-born calf.

At length came the call of a whip-poor-will, thrice repeated; a bit unsteady, perhaps a little breathless—but by dogies,

THE stampede rumbling in his ears, excitement raging around him, and danger lying in wait for him, united to strike a spark in Tom's brain that fired him with all the merciless desperation of the frantic herd. He suddenly craved to see his horse's hooves crush the man who had burned his buildings, stolen his stock, and murdered his men. Cutting past the wagon, he sent the horse plunging at Rancon as if the Mexican were a bush to be hurdled, crashed through, or trampled down. But Jose sprang nimbly aside and his hand darted to his holster. Simultaneously Tom jerked the pony to its haunches, dropped low on its far side, and whipped a shot across the cantle of the saddle. It seemed that the flame from Rancon's gun singed his horse's hair, and he felt a surge within the animal as the bullet thudded home. Before he could yank his Colt out of its recoil, he saw the Mexican spin half around and go down—strangling and coughing and shrouded in the smoke of his own gun.

Almost at that instant the horse collapsed and Tom flung himself clear. As he hit the ground, he saw Moonshine come shambling like a buffalo bull from behind a clump of tall grass; and he caught a glimpse of the giant Negro, naked to the waist, dropping out of the wagon with the agility of an ape—an ape armed with a long butcher knife.

For the moment spellbound, he watched these two mighty men come together—one unbelievably tall and black, the other tremendously broad and hairy. The Negro's bullet head was thrust forward and drawn down between bulging shoulders, his thick lips sagged loosely, and he whined like a ravenous wolf. He launched a sweeping blow that would have cut Moonshine in two, had it landed; but the outlaw parried with the skill of a fencer, and leaped aside. Throwing back his head, he let out a yell so savage and terrible as momentarily to amaze his antagonist and to startle even Tom, and plunged into the fight.

The cowman couldn't tear his eyes away from the combatants. He tried to reload, and had trouble with a stubborn shell. His fingers were all thumbs, for it was a sight that knotted his nerves and raised the hair on his neck. The lantern flickered on the ground beyond them. Their bodies clenched into a single writhing, twisting mass of muscle, but at intervals an arm or leg shot out in silhouette against the light. Now—each clutched the other's knife wrist. From his superior height, the black man slowly forced the butcher knife downward.

"Damned if it won't cut his head plumb off!" thought Tom, and he almost chanced a shot.

Then the burly outlaw smashed his head upward into the negro's face, and the next instant buried his teeth in the black throat —jerking and ripping like an enraged dog.

A cartridge slipped from Tom's fingers. Pain stabbed at his own throat.

The colored man swayed and spraddled his legs to steady himself. In a flash Moonshine drove upward with a knee as hard as a postoak stump—a paralyzing blow.

Tom could feel his stomach crawl.

The great black body appeared suddenly drained of strength. Out into the light swept a long arm with a blade at its end. It seemed to hesitate as though taking aim, then forward it darted—followed by an upward and inward heave of the shoulder behind it.

Moonshine shoved the dying Negro away, and stepped back.

His ribs rose and fell steadily, and he ran one hand over his mustache and beard while the other sheathed his knife. Glancing across at Tom, he grinned and demanded, "What're you gawkin' at? Betcha you go into spasms fust time you see me tarn myself loose in earnest."

The young man holstered his gun. " 'Tain't likely," he drawled. "You did put up a purty fair fight, but I know a Tonkawa squaw that could've ripped the liver

out'n both of you. We better ramble befo' some of them hands gits back, or the night hawk busts in with the remoother."

Moonshine planted his hands on his hips and stood solidly on his two feet. "Ramble hell! Let's us stick right here and finish the job complete."

Tom looked off in the direction the herd had gone, and down at Rancon's body. "This here job is plumb finished."

Turning on his heel, he muttered in a tired voice, "But I got me another job that ain't."

"Bully!"

They found their mounts in the draw where they left them. While putting on his spurs, Tom casually inquired, "Where the devil did you ever git that there squall of your'n?"

Moonshine arose from a struggle with his boots. A grin threatened to split his face. "Bawned with it. My old mammy says that's the fust sound I ever made. And she swears that my pappy heard it down to the corral more'n a mile off, and the pore old cuss fainted plumb away 'cause he was a-hankerin' for it to be a boy, and allowed he'd ketched a varmint!"

For the second time in his life, Tom Carlin put the wrong foot in his stirrup.

CHAPTER III

"WAH-HOO! FETCH ME A FIGHT!"

ALONG toward sundown two days later, Ranse Dakin, his two deputies, and a JX hand were holding down a bench on the porch of The Brasada Saloon. While in the act of building a cigarette, the hand glanced up the street and caught sight of two riders who were jogging slowly into town from the west. He spilled the makin's, but didn't seem to notice it.

"Holy mavericks!" he exclaimed. "Looky yonder, fellas."

"I'm lookin' but I don't see nothin' special," muttered Dakin—a tall, powerfully-built man with sandy hair and mustache, and small, alert eyes set close together.

"Then you better git yo'self some specs," retorted the hand. "Them two jaspers looks powerful big to me, 'specially the ganglin' one."

Deputy Walt Bruce spoke up, "Hell, man! That there fuzzy-faced hippopotamus on the overgrown mule would make two of the other'n."

The hand grinned wisely. "You wouldn't say that if you knowed as much about the other fella as I do. They ain't nobody can make two of him."

"Who is he?"

"Black Jack," drawled the hand.

The three officers looked more carefully at the strangers. "Huh!" snorted Dakin. "You're crazy. Black Jack disappeared thorough and complete more'n a year ago. A sheriff from down south was tellin' me they figger he got wiped out somewheres over across the border. Durned shame, too. His hide was worth money in this country."

"Then he's done resurrected hisself, and I wouldn't put it past him," declared the cowman. "If you'd ever seen Black Jack rigged out in them fancy clothes and ridin' a high-headed black hoss, a-joggin' into town to celebrate, you'd be damned shore to know him the next time. Last time I seen the cuss was down below the Frio. He had him a cow-huntin' crew, every last one of 'em wildcats from away back, and he was getherin' stuff at so much a head. Them fellas would trail a critter plumb through hell and fetch her back through the smoke, regardless. They'd go into the brush after cows and come out with cows and scalps—no foolin'."

Ranse Dakin watched the two riders with a new interest.

THE sporty Black Jack bore little resemblance to the ragged robber, and even Moonshine was spruced up. His heavy black hair and beard had been neatly trimmed, his old Stetson replaced by a new one pearl gray in color, and beneath an open pony skin vest he sported a new

woolen shirt, laid out in blue and orange checks that announced his coming. The bulky outlaw afforded a striking contrast to his lean, almost haggard companion who was dressed in black from head to foot.

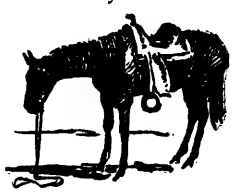
They came on leisurely, talking and looking the town over as though it was strange to them. Black Jack noticed that their passage down the street attracted attention, and wished it were otherwise. But Moonshine rode with his new hat at a jaunty angle, and from time to time flashed a toothy smile or waved a large hand at someone on the sidewalk.

"Reckon the marshal in this here town ain't lookin' for you," drawled Black Jack, "or you wouldn't be so all-fired sot on showin' off thataway."

Moonshine chuckled comfortably. "You are dead wrong. They want me here—more or less—but not when I'm a-packin' whiskers."

"If it was me, I'd a heap ruther have you with whiskers. They hide mighty nigh all yo' face."

Moonshine threw back his head and laughed in a booming way that attracted even more attention to the pair. "For a fact, this here face of mine shore has brung me bushels of misery in my day. Jest let me stay in one place long enough to sorta git acquainted, and fust thing I know the gals is a-fightin' over me. Bar'ls of innercent female blood has been shed, all on account of my face—no foolin'."



This banter continued until they had reached the livery corral on the other side of town, where they put up their mounts with instructions that they be fed and rubbed down immediately.

As they started back afoot, Black Jack paused at the gate to take a good look at a one-story rock dwelling which sprawled on top of a hill some distance from the middle of town. On his first visit to Brasada he had learned that Sam Toller lived in that house, and he was in a hurry to go there; but he'd have to wait until night to make the call.

So he turned his attention to the serious business of looking out for himself. He had seen the marshal and deputies, and thought the cowhand's face was familiar; but that didn't particularly bother him. Riding into a town where he was a wanted man was no novelty in Black Jack's experience; principally owing to the fact that he made it a practice never to get along with crooked officers or politicians. But he knew that the eyes of frontiersmen were sharp, and half expected someone to identify him as the robber.

REGARDLESS of the danger—he told himself that it was mighty good again to walk the streets of a lively town, all barbered up and rigged out as slick as a whistle. Like any other young man, he enjoyed the admiring glances of the women he met and the envious looks of the fellows. Listening to the hilarious talk and laughter that arose on every hand and watching the horseplay of the boys who were in town to spend their wages and celebrate, he heaved a sigh.

Long time since he celebrated. A-workin' and a-ridin' until his bones clenched in the leather, all because he made up his mind to settle down. Hell's Fire! Black Jack had a heap more fun than Tom Carlin; fancy clothes, money to spend, and not a damned thing to worry about.

For an instant his shoulders sagged and his feet were heavy.

What was the use of settlin' down anyhow? To the devil with the TP! Whip Sam Toller to a frazzle, then tell him to take the TP and go to hell with it. Find Ranse Dakin, bust him in the jaw, then

fill the skunk full of lead 'cause he shot Dad Gannon. Next thing to do would be to get on a rip-roarin' drunk, and bust up things, and mingle in a few nice rough and tumble fights, and howl and sing and make folks say—"Take keer! Here come Black Jack and he's on a toot!"

And Moonshine — by dogies, jest the fella to have along! They'd tree the old town and twist her tail!

Then roll in and sleep for a week.

His attention was attracted to a group at the door of a nearby saloon. Surrounded by his cronies, a young man with a happy face was proudly displaying a pair of boy's boots; very small boots. He stood 'em on his wide palm and had room to spare. The fellows laughed at the size of the boots. For a three-year-old, more'n likely. Boots with red tops and a single blue star in front. And he heard the young man say something about "—light out for home 'cause my Old Lady's got a couple of yaller-legged friers a-brownin' in the skillet."

Black Jack walked on, sort of wondering how much the Old Dutchman and his boys would charge to put him up a rock house, close to the big spring at the head of TP Valley.

They were nearing Charley Wu's restaurant when he saw the girl. A short distance down the sidewalk, she stepped from a store and came toward them. He felt himself stiffen, and his steps lagged. He wanted to meet her face to face and speak to her, and hear her speak to him, and told himself that he was a damned fool to do it. When they reached the door of the restaurant, she was but a few yards away and he saw her looking steadily at him.

Black Jack stopped. Might as well have it over with and find out whether folks were going to know him. This gal would catch on if anybody would. And he hoped she'd recognize him! The girl didn't pause; but she slowed down and smiled a warm little smile that disappeared as quickly as it came. He lifted his hat. She glanced briefly at something across the street, and strode on rapidly. He looked casually in that direction. Charley Wu's little restaurant seemed to hold something of interest to Ranse Dakin and his two deputies.

Black Jack turned on his heel and followed Moonshine into the place. They ate plenty and were a long time about it. At the conclusion of the meal, he was mildly surprised when the old timer suggested that he return alone to the corral after their mounts.

"Gotta git me some terbaccy and ca'tridges," Moonshine explained. "Reckon I could git 'long without the smokin', but I'm damned shore to be needin' the ca'tridges." Waddling away, he called over his shoulder, "Be damned keerful how you handle that there mule."

KILLING time at the corral while waiting for darkness, Black Jack questioned the proprietor enough to learn definitely that the robber hadn't been identified and Tom Carlin was still unknown in Brasada. This was good news. He didn't care what they thought of Black Jack, but he wanted the TP to have a clean bill-of-health. Of course, Toller and Dakin would know that Carlin was behind the raid on the Double L herd; so Black Jack had ridden back to town with the conviction that there would never be any peace in TP Valley until he had settled with them.

While tying his big black and Leetle Angel at the rack before The Rio Grande, he saw Moonshine come swaggering down the sidewalk. He watched men grin at the happy ruffian and carelessly move out of his path; and he saw girls smile encouragement at the big devil, girls with rouged lips and cheeks.

The old timer greeted Black Jack with a prodigious wink and a huge fist that threatened to crack some ribs. "Ruffle up yo' feathers and strut, Old Hoss Face, 'cause the gals is a-looking' us over."

The young man's long features got

longer, but he smiled with his eyes. "And fust thing you know, Old Satan'll be lookin' you over if you don't keep yo' paws off'n me."

So they went into The Rio Grande—Moonshine grinning and devilish and hoping for trouble, Black Jack serious and alert and expecting it. The long bar was lined with men, some of the tables were occupied, and men and women were milling around on the dance floor at the rear of the room while the three-piece orchestra downed its first drink of the evening.

The news of their arrival appeared to flit from person to person, and Black Jack was startled to find many eyes upon him. The thought flashed through his mind that they had spotted him as the robber—that girl, of course. But a more careful survey assured him there was nothing unfriendly in those stares — merely an inquisitive, even polite interest. Having found a table that placed his back to a wall, he soon discovered the answer. Leaning against the bar—surrounded by an air of importance and a cluster of men, was the cowhand with the familiar face.

A waiter came to take their orders. He had a flourishing mustache, a grin, and a degree of off-hand respect. Black Jack called for a bottle of beer, and Moonshine snorted. "Huh! I left off drinkin' that there branch water the day my mammy weaned me. Fact is—if I wa'n't sorta dispeptical I wouldn't do no drinkin' nohow; but I jest have to take a leetle gentle stimilant now and then so's to keep my vittles from cuttin' capers in my stummick."

He ordered a quart of whiskey.

While the situation gave the young man plenty of food for thought, it bothered the old timer not at all. His sharp eyes danced beneath their bushy brows, and his beard fairly bristled. When the liquor arrived, he took a mighty drink and set the bottle down with a sigh.

"Lawsy me! That shore is soul-resuspitatin' likker!" he boomed. Lowering his voice, he spoke through his whiskers, "Where in hell is Old Man Trouble? I'm a-honin' to lay hands on the ornery cuss."

"Jest calm yo'self," muttered Black Jack. "I allow he's on his way, a-fetchin' plenty help along."

AND the next moment this prophesy came true. In walked Ranse Dakin, flanked by the two deputies. Their faces were stern and they had the air of men going about serious business. The big marshal swept a glance around the room. His hard eyes hesitated for an instant upon Black Jack and Moonshine, then he tramped off to the bar. The two deputies crossed the room to the table nearest the cowman and his companion, and sat down facing them.

"Glory be!" whispered the old timer. "We're in for it now."

Gazing thoughtfully at the marshal's broad back, the young man answered softly, "Nope, we ain't. But some other folks shore is."

Moonshine chuckled all over. He waved his bottle at the deputies in a cordial gesture. They shook their heads. He grinned and called out to them, "Better ketch holt and hang on, fellas, 'cause I'm a-fixin' to tarn myself loose."

Liquor again gurgled down his throat.

Black Jack absently turned his bottle around and around on the table, occasionally glancing from it to the marshal and back again. Dakin had come to get him—no doubt about it; and he wondered whether the girl had done him dirt. Or maybe Dakin wanted Black Jack and not Tom Carlin. Course, it didn't make no difference nohow. The bottle was wet and so were his hands. He brought out a handkerchief and dried them with care.

Looking intently at the bottle and scarcely moving his lips, he said, "You kivver my back. If we git separated, I'm a-headin' straight for Toller's."

Moonshine grunted, and took another drink—a big drink.

Black Jack arose and walked slowly toward the marshal. The crown of his black Stetson towered above the heads of most of those present, and his close-fitted black clothing made him appear even taller and leaner. The lamp-light threw shadows beneath his cheek bones, sharpened the angle of his jaw and chin, and deepened the lines at the corners of his eyes and mouth. The unhurried fashion in which he crossed the floor, pausing to let a busy waiter pass before him, avoiding tables and chairs and side-stepping staggering men, gave the impression he was merely ambling up to the bar to speak to a friend; and no one could have suspected that the furrows carved in his face by fatigue had suddenly become deep lines of concentration. For Black Jack was thinking hard, oblivious to everything and everybody but the job he had to do and the man with whom he had to deal. He knew that Dakin saw him in the mirror, but the marshal gave no sign; just stood there, fingering a glass of whiskey and talking to a bartender.

Kind of a funny feelin', a-walkin' up on a fella that you aim to kill, a-lookin' him over careful-like and a figgerin' how you'll start the rumpus, a-wonderin' whether he'll die hard or easy and whether maybeso he's jest a mite faster than you are.

Six feet away he stopped and spoke pleasantly, "How're you, Marshal?"

Dakin emptied his glass, set it down, stroked and twisted his mustache, and turned his back to the bar. "Howdy your ownself, stranger."

Standing at ease, the cowman said very quietly, "Where I hail from, folks mostly call me 'Black Jack'."

RANSE DAKIN comfortably hooked his thumbs in his belt convenient to his guns, and let a cold eye wander over the gunfighter with all the emotion of a man inspecting a beef steer. "Far as color goes, that there name shore fits you, Mister."

Those in their immediate vicinity fell silent; a silence that was contagious and spread rapidly. The subtle instinct of a crowd with a nose for bloodshed warned the spectators that trouble was imminent, although no fighting talk had passed.

Black Jack's deep voice was smooth and matter of fact. "A leetle while back, a fella said you was lookin' for me," he said with a drawl. "Did you jest sorta want to git acquainted, sah, or have you got somethin' special on yo' mind?"

Having the fight thus brought to him may have surprised Dakin, but he cleverly disguised his feelings. After an almost imperceptible shifting of his eyes, he grinned mirthlessly. "Nothin' partic'lar. Robbed any more folks lately?"

A regular icicle, thought Black Jack. Maybe he deserved his reputation for being plumb dangerous. "I'd shore lie like hell about it if I had," dryly admitted the young man. "Don't you?"

Sitting on the far end of the bar, a buxom woman giggled nervously and poked fingers in her hair. Moonshine gripped the neck of his bottle in position for a back-handed throw.

The marshal answered in a low, clear voice, "Course you'd lie, but it won't do you no good 'cause you been spotted by that there scab on the back of your right hand."

A trick. An attempt to divert Black Jack's attention for the necessary fraction of a second.

He knew it, and didn't glance down as another man might have done.

In a twinkling that right hand held a gun at the top of its holster. A shock jarred the building. Lamps swayed and flickered. Smoke lashed out at the marshal's middle and mushroomed over him. He lurched backward against the bar, bent almost double, and toppled forward on his face. His outflung hand held a Colt, and his thumb blindly groped for the hammer.

The buxom woman laughed hysterically. Black Jack spun around, swept the

crowd with a cold and impersonal glance, and backed slowly toward the door.

ALMOST at the instant the cowman fired, Moonshine whipped his bottle through the air. Thrown with tremendous force, the heavy missile struck Deputy Bruce low in the chest and put him out of the fight. Before anyone realized what he had done, the old timer came up swinging his own table from the floor. He slammed it into the deputies' table and Lum Akers went down beneath the two of them, struggling with his holster. The crash of splintering wood blended with the roar of his gun, and the bullet flew wide.

Out of the smoke and confusion, came Moonshine's booming voice, "Wah-hoo! Fetch me a fight!"

He might have been a raging buffalo bull in the confines of a crowded room. Things in his way simply went to pieces. With a gun at his thigh and a knife at his belt, he nevertheless loomed up in the mêlée with a table leg in his fist; a man fired by the joy of battle, rather than a thirst to kill. Akers went out from a glancing blow that would have crushed his skull had it landed squarely. A lanky man drew a knife and tried to dodge behind the old timer. The club splintered his arm and almost tore him in two. Swinging his table leg as if it were no heavier than a quirt, Moonshine swept a reflector lamp from the wall and smashed the hanging lamp over his head.

Black Jack thought fast. The big fellow was setting out to bust up the place. A fool play. Good-natured crowd, tickled to watch a fella celebrate, and maybe help him some. But Dakin must have friends in the room; and besides, some innocent person was bound to get hurt and take a hand in the ruckus. He couldn't watch 'em all, so the old timer was due to stop lead any instant.

"Moonshine!" he roared. The big outlaw turned like a bear changing ends. "Git out! I'll hold 'em!"

For a split second the burly ruffian hesitated. Then he reared back and let go his "pussonal warwhoop." It filled the room and rattled the shingles. Whirling the table leg aloft, he sent it twisting and spinning through the air into the mirror behind the bar.

Above the crash of glass, Black Jack's voice again rang out, "Barkeep, drop it!"

A gun clattered to the floor and a bartender sheepishly folded his arms.

Moonshine wasted no more time. He whipped a chair through the nearest window—taking sash and all, and went out after it.

One man laughed and a ripple of mirth ran around the room. In a flash, Black Jack knew it was up to him. Say and do the right things and he'd hold off pursuit until Toller took charge—if he ever did. He holstered his gun, and stood very straight and calm beside the door.

"'Pears to me the boss of this here place has got some damages comin' to him," he drawled easily. "One of these days I'll drift in and settle up."

From behind the bar, a red-faced man with a paunch called out, "Be right glad to see you, Mister Black Jack, but make shore to leave your evil geenyus to home."

The crowd laughed. Black Jack grinned and turned to the door. "I'll see can I sorta tame the cuss," he remarked over his shoulder. "So long."

Although in a devilish hurry, he walked leisurely to the rack. Leetle Angel wasn't there, so he figured Moonshine had lit out for Toller's.

ONCE away from The Rio Grande, Black Jack made the dust fly. He had to finish his business with the loan shark before news of the killing reached him; a matter of minutes at the most. He dismounted at a motte of trees fifty yards from the house, and tied his horse where it was unlikely to be seen. Figured he'd find the old timer in those trees ahead of him, and couldn't help wondering what had become of the big devil. From the edge of the timber, he looked the situation over. A full moon gave him a clear view of the L-shaped, rock building and most of the ground around it; but nothing he saw resembled the old timer or his mule.

Where in hell was Moonshine?

Black Jack listened a moment, peering into every shadow, then shrugged angrily and cursed under his breath. Couldn't afford to wait, so he'd have to go it alone. Might have his hands full, too. They said that Toller was a bachelor with two servants: an evil-tempered Mexican about the size of a full-grown bull, and the Mexican's wife who was nearly as big and twice as mean as her husband. He reloaded the empty chamber in his Colt, looked long in the direction of town, then walked boldly and rapidly toward the house.

The shades at the windows of the long front room were drawn, but there was light behind them; and the end room in the right wing was lighted: where the Mexicans lived, more than likely. He knew it was foolish to rampse in without scouting the place; but they'd be coming from town any minute, and Toller would go back with 'em, and—Hell! He'd take a chance.

What the devil had become of Moonshine, he wondered.

Heavy footsteps answered Black Jack's knock. The door swung open, and he found himself facing a man who looked as big and hairy and ornery as a grizzly. No time for words. Through the door at a stride, he rammed the muzzle of his Colt into the startled Mexican's paunch with force enough to knock out the ordinary man.

"H'ist 'em Mex!"

Staggered and half paralyzed by the blow, the fellow nevertheless managed to lift his hairy paws as high as his shoulders.

An instant after he jabbed the Mexican, Black Jack shifted the muzzle of his gun.

"You too, Toller!" he commanded in a quiet, level voice.

The loan shark sat at a table littered with books and papers, a small safe standing open against the wall immediately behind his chair. His head and the right side of his face were swathed in bandages, and his eyes were silts in swollen and discolored flesh.

Black Jack got him covered in the nick of time. He was in the act of reaching for the gun that hung in a holster on the back of his chair. For an instant he hesitated as though calculating his chances.

"Better git 'em up, Toller," said the cowman in the same even tone. "You ain't got a ghost of a show."

Mumbling an oath, the loan shark got to his feet; but he made no move to obey the command. Then sudden recognition sent the blood racing to the exposed part of his face, and he lifted his hands.

"Why, by God, you're the sonofa——"

"Yep — I'm him, and I ain't finished with you by a damned sight." Black Jack kicked the door closed behind him. "Better shet yo' dirty mouth befo' I bust out the balance of yo' teeth."

The loan man clamped his lips.

Momentarily, Black Jack was in a quandary. Toller wasn't scaring worth a damn. Dangerous to leave that gun on the back of the chair, and risky as the devil to try to get it. He knew the cuss wouldn't pass it over, and he dare not go close enough for these big fellows to lay hands on him. Reckoned he'd have to take a chance on keeping Toller away from the

gun. So he backed off a step, failing to notice that he stopped before a window opening into the patio.

Slipping his left hand into his shirt, he brought out a package and tossed it onto the table. "There's two thousand dollars," he said, speaking rapidly. "Tom Carlin sent it to pay off that there forged note. I'm Tom's brother. Gimme the note if you got it here, and if you ain't—jest write me a receipt for the money. Git movin'!"

Toller's eyes moved craftily behind their swollen lids, and he had perfect control of his voice. "How do I know you're his brother?"

"You don't. Git busy!"

At that instant Black Jack heard the beat of hoofs in the direction of town. It couldn't be Moonshine. He wouldn't make so much racket. Toller heard it too, damn him!

The loan shark opened the package, taking his time about it. "I'll gamble that this is the money you stole from me."

Those hoofs were coming that way, no doubt about it!

BLACK JACK was suddenly struck by a thought. Some fellas made more fuss over a boil than they did over a bullet through their bellows. Toller's head must be awful sore after the beating it got. So he took a half step forward and significantly lifted the muzzle of his gun. "Are you hankerin' for me to pistol-whip you some more? Money's money. Gimme that there note!"

Toller flinched. Muscles knotted at unexpected places on his face. His fingers were a bit unsteady as they fumbled through a bundle labeled "NOTES," and drew out a slip of paper.

"Mark it paid and sign yo' name," commanded Black Jack. "Then hand it over."

Funny how quiet everything was. He heard the pen a-scratchin' on the paper, and he heard those hoofs a-trottin' on the hard ground of the trail up the hill.

The big Mexican shifted his weight from one foot to the other and back again. Black Jack's nerves were jumpy. He almost shot the man.

"Be still, you big ox!" he growled hoarsely.

Toller looked up with a sly gleam in his eye, and extended the note. The cowman took it and stepped back.

The hoofs pounded boldly into the yard and stopped!

Black Jack heard the creak of leather and the jangle of spurs, then a grunt—or maybe a gasp. The loan shark's eyes darted to the door and back to him, at once triumphant and vicious. The cowman held his breath and listened for the clatter of heels on the porch, and wondered what to do when he heard them. Then his heart leaped at the call of the whip-poor-will, twice repeated!

That there bird was mighty close, and a-flyin' high, wide, and handsome!

Black Jack started to call out, but his cry ended in an oath. A bullet ripped through his vest and shirt, and burned a furrow in the skin across the small of his back. Simultaneously, through the open window on the patio came the roar of a gun and a woman's voice lifted in a scream of pain. Toller's arm darted down to the gun on his chair, and the Mexican's hand whipped to the knife at the back of his belt.

While in the act of thumbing his hammer, the lean cowman shifted aside as light-footed as a cat—a move that possibly saved his life. Sam Toller's gun seemed to explode full in his face, and the slug grazed his neck. The loan shark was going down when he fired. He had been a split-second slow. Black Jack's shot flung him backward against the safe. His knees buckled, and the smoking gun sagged in fingers unable to bear its weight.

A great body loomed up in the smoke before the cowman, and a knife came plunging down upon him. Without conscious thought, he twisted out of its path

and fired into the mighty chest that was almost against the muzzle of his Colt. The shock of the lead and the force of the explosion drove the giant Mexican back a step; but Black Jack realized in a flash that one bullet would never stop the man unless, by accident, it found a vital spot. The roar of his second shot was lost in a greater blast, and the Mexican crashed sidewise against the table and onto the floor.

Black Jack looked in amazement at a front window. Beneath the shade protruded the muzzle of a smoking rifle—a Sharp's .50!

HE HAD no time to indulge in surprise, or wonder how Moonshine got there. The inside door to the right wing flung open, and through it staggered an enormous Mexican woman. Her broad face was twisted in pain. She gripped her shoulder and blood seeped through her fingers, and she stared as though fascinated at something before her — meanwhile cursing huskily in both Spanish and English.

The glittering blade of a bowie knife followed her through the door—Moonshine's knife, for no other bowie knife could be as long; and after it came a girl —the girl!

Black Jack swore conscientiously.

Smiling like an imp of Satan, she feinted with the knife until its point came within inches of the big woman's expansive bosom. "Back to the wall, old girl!" she exclaimed. "Keep movin' or I'll carve my initials on you. You will try to bushwhack a friend of mine!"

Without turning her head she called out cheerfully, "Good evening, Black Jack. This old sister might've got you if I hadn't showed up in time to spoil her aim."

The young man struggled with his voice. Knew he ought to say something, but couldn't figure what it'd be.

Moonshine plunged through the front door like a stampeding buffalo. "Good work, boy!" he bellowed. "In all my bawn days I never seen faster shootin'."

Black Jack looked down at the Mexican's body. "Reckon you come a-rackin' in jest when I needed help. Much obliged, old timer." He glanced across at the girl and grinned. "That goes for you, too. I'm shore thankful, Miss."

Moonshine leaned his rifle against the wall, and cast a humorous eye upon the girl and her captive. Suddenly he brought his palm down on his thigh with a crack, and his booming laugh filled the room. "Jest pin her to the wall with my skinnin' knife, Annie, and mosey over here."

Unable to believe his ears, Black Jack brushed the back of his hand across his eyes and looked helplessly around the room.

The girl came to where the men were standing. Her eyes danced when she saw the money on the table. "That's a mighty interesting pile of greenbacks, Uncle Moonshine."

The old timer reached for the money and stuffed it into his hip pocket. "'Tis that, and we shore need it." He looked up at Black Jack with a twinkle in his eye. "You see it's like this, young fella. This here purty niece of mine gits her a job over to Bud Simmons' jest long enough to wheedle the combination of Toller's safe out'n Chester, and tonight we done cleaned 'er. Yes sah, that there money-box is as clean as hound's tooth and I ain't talkin'."

A pair of outlaws, thought Black Jack. Somehow or other, he didn't like the idea very much.

The girl watched him from the corner

of her eye, and a trickly little smile played about her lips. He glanced at her, then quickly looked away.

Moonshine swaggered toward the door. "Come on, Annie. Let's us ramble. We gotta push lots of country behind us befo' mawnin'. Me—I been hung so durned frequent it don't aggravate me no mo', but you ain't noways used to dancin' on air."

She burst out laughing. "Don't take it so hard, Black Jack. I'm not exactly a thief."

There was something in his face that sobered her instantly. She came a step nearer, and went on seriously, "We're merely getting back a part of what Sam Toller took from my Dad—Colonel McCarthy of the NPN. There being no law here or where we live, Dad sued in the District Court. But he didn't get anywhere with it. Toller pulled too many wires."

Moonshine chimed in. "Course he cain't git nowheres! Law co'ts and jedges and sech-like ain't no good fixin's for a square man to pester with nohow. Git a move on you, gal! Are you aimin' to camp here the balance of the night, jest a-makin' eyes at that there wuthless scamp?"

Blushing diligently, Annie McCarthy followed the old timer. At the door she paused and observed softly, but nevertheless casually, "From what Uncle tells me, your TP isn't more than a hundred miles due south of the NPN. So 'long—Tom."

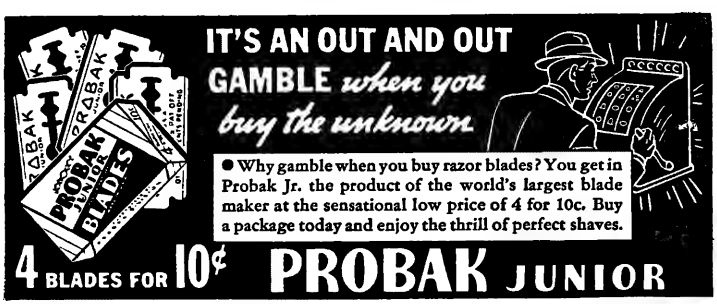
He said something polite, but never could remember what it was.

STANDING in the middle of the floor with the TP note in his hand, Black Jack carefully took stock of things. Two dead men and a looted safe—more than likely Brasada would close the safe, plant the dead men, get gloriously drunk, and let it go at that. But if she didn't—the nearest law with authority outside of town was a United States marshal two hundred miles away, and the Rangers who might be anywhere in Texas. And suppose marshal or Rangers did sit into the game, they'd be looking for Black Jack anyhow.

He stared thoughtfully at the Mexican woman over in a corner. A witness, sure enough—against Black Jack. No two ways about it, Black Jack was the man they'd want.

Tom Carlin of the TP had a clean bill of health. He heaved a sigh—but Black Jack had better stay plumb dead from now on.

At the door, Tom gazed out into the night and listened. Down from the north came the call of a whip-poor-will, twice repeated. He strode quickly to where his horse was tied. Tom was in a hurry to get home and find out how much the Old Dutchman and his boys were going to charge to build him a rock house, close to the big spring at the head of TP Valley.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The Melting Pot of the Orient Bubbles with an Evil Brew

NUMBER ONE BOY

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "The Doctor Flies," "Hong-kong Cabin," etc.

CARLIN had been away from Shanghai for six months. Now he was back and delighted to be back, walking along the pleasant Bund, at the races, in the club, at the miraculous Hotel Cathay, one again with the melting-pot of the Orient world.

This lasted two days. On the third day he saw Agnes Sartain, and forgot the past.

Carlin was thirty, unmarried, and correspondent for a string of Canadian newspapers who kept both eyes on China; commercial interests dictate news. Carlin was a crisp blond, impulsive at times, with sunny smiling features that concealed a lot of things not so sunny or smiling. He had bright blue eyes, which are rare in a man.

"Hold on. Who is she?" he asked Father Tim Healy, as she drifted past their table like a dream-woman.

Father Tim was lunching with him in the hotel dining-room; they were old friends, opposites in many ways, with a healthy respect for each other. Father Tim cast his shrewd eye after the girl in green and gold, and back again to Carlin's face.

"For you, the most dangerous woman in China."

"You have a damnable habit of uttering

half-truths; it must exasperate St. Peter."

"They're founded on a fair knowledge of human nature, Carlin."

"So you think. That girl's no more dangerous than I am."

"Who said you weren't?" asked Father Tim. "Now, if you're positive the franc is going off gold, I'd like to gamble a bit on your inside information. My chapel needs a new roof."

Carlin quite understood that Father Tim would not talk about the girl in green and gold; he deliberately disregarded the tacit warning. The hotel manager, after lunch, was more accommodating. Carlin lived at the hotel and could have about what he wanted.

"Here you are, Mr. Carlin. A Miss Agnes Sartain of San Francisco. She's been here three weeks and has engaged her suite for another month. Alone? Why, yes. A tourist, I think. She has a number of friends here and seems quite charming. I've heard that she's a relative of Jimmy Martin. He's been in several times to see her."

"Holy smoke!" Carlin whistled softly. "So the lion and the lamb lie down together, do they?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Carlin," said the literal-minded manager, looking shocked.

Carlin grinned and went his way.

That evening he went out to the Cercle Interallié for dinner and a bit of gambling. He went alone, knowing he would be sure to run into somebody; and he did. He ran into the Ed Hoppers in the bar. Ed and Jane insisted that he join them for dinner. To his awed delight they rescued Agnes Sartain from a group of French officers—and he found himself sitting opposite her at dinner. It was like a miracle, he thought. He vaguely gathered that the French rallied to her because she was of French extraction or something.

What he had sensed at luncheon when she passed, he felt more vitally in her presence. It was beyond ready comprehension. She was not beautiful at all. Chic, yes; that went without saying. No assurance, no confident sophistication; not the type of woman to induce a story of salty wit. She had a rather sweet face, rather sad, rather uninterested, and somehow an oddly virginal figure, though it was not at all lacking. It was when she smiled that the shock came—the actual shock.

Her smile was positive sunlight. It transfigured her, elicited a different woman, called forth a sudden charm, introduced one to what lay behind her exterior mask. Carlin could understand how those Frenchmen had tried to make her smile; with her, a smile was as rare as it was, with him, the usual thing. And it held sheer magic.

He talked with her, danced with her, took her back to the Cathay, and found how very rarely she did smile. When he said good night, she rewarded him, and in that smile Carlin read or fancied a lot of things. He went up to his room, put his head in his hands, and thought hard. He recalled what Jane Hopper said of her, when Ed was dancing with her:

"Jimmy Martin? Yes; she's his wife's sister. His wife's dead, you know. I don't know what she's doing here. She doesn't talk about it. There's a queer look in her eyes at times; as though she were straining to do something beyond her powers and was in terror of it. Tell me, please! Should I buy francs or not?"

Francs! Everybody crazy to gamble on a tip that France was going off gold, that the franc was taking a nose-dive. What the hell did francs matter anyway? Carlin poured a small drink, downed it, and scowled at himself in the mirror.

"So she likes you; and you can sense it, eh?" he observed. "Well, at your age, with your experience, in your position—don't be a damned fool. Go to bed and sleep."

He got into bed. Yes, she had a queer look in her eyes, and Jane Hopper had hit it. Straining at something beyond her powers, and afraid. A look of hidden terror.

Such things catch at a man. Carlin tried to argue that he could scent a story in her and wanted to run it down. This was a lie, and he admitted as much. He had a date to take her to the races next afternoon, too, with the Hoppers. Next thing would be a date just for the two of—

Carlin cursed, rammed his head into the pillow, concentrated on the upper end of his nose, and this psychological trick put him to sleep, finally.

NEXT day, at the races, he set himself to study her. He got her away from the glittering French officers and whisked her off to the paddock. There, Jimmy Martin was one of the gentleman riders; he won in the fourth, with a shaggy mount so fresh from Mongolia that only a master could handle the crazy brute; Martin was a master in the saddle. And they came face to face with Martin, who spoke and went on. Carlin suddenly sensed a shrinking in the girl, a glint in Martin's eye. Something was up, by heaven!

The odd thing, to Carlin, was that money seemed not to excite her. She lost with a shrug. She won twice, and handsomely, with a mere nod. She never showed any interest when the others were yammering at him for inside dope on the franc. Yet she wore no jewelry. Her clothes were not insultingly expensive; the most one could say for them was that they seemed to blend with her and escape the eye. When he mentioned this to Jane Hopper, she flung a little laugh at him.

"And you don't know how rare a thing that is? Shame on you!"

That evening he saw her in the spacious lobby, talking in a corner with Father Tim Healy. They were serious, intent, absorbed. Carlin carefully kept his distance, but his brain woke up. Something wrong, eh? People always dragged in Father Tim when they needed help. Straining at something beyond her powers—yes.

Curiosity, and more, drew at Carlin now. He went next evening to the Santa Monica Cloisters, by himself. He could no more have kept away from there now than he could have avoided plunging on the diving franc.

Jimmy Martin ran the place, and ran it well, with several younger men on his staff and his Phi Beta Kappa key usually in sight. A Shanghai joint run by American college boys—you see how it drew the tourist crowd. There were hand-picked Chinese girls as taxi dancers; they were taxi dancers and nothing else, too, a rare and beautiful thing in Shanghai. Tickets cost only a couple of cents, but a girl at your table hit you for five bucks—champagne—and her time besides, to the exact minute. Jimmy Martin had all those things figured out to the last detail.

Carlin ordered champagne and sat by himself. Presently Martin came along, impeccably clad except for the gold key dangling in sight. A big fellow, Martin, almost as big as his huge Russian bouncer, quite dwarfing Carlin; but his waist-line was gone. He had an intent look in his eyes, red cheeks under black brows and hair, and an air of prosperity.

"Hello, Carlin. Glad to see you back," he said genially. "Not dancing?"

"I prefer Blood Alley," Carlin returned with his sunny smile. "Those gals give your money's worth down there. Rest your heels?"

Martin had been awaiting the invitation. He pulled out a chair, produced cigarettes, and his eyes flickered around the place. Carlin caught that flicker and it brought him alert. The Russian bouncer, eh? What was Jimmy Martin up to, anyhow? Then he found the flickering eyes at rest, on his own face.

"Got any dope on the French franc?" he asked. "I hear you're wise to the future."

"You must keep your ears open."

"And my eyes too."

Carlin felt the intangible something in those words. He met Martin's intent gaze squarely, and lost his smile.

"Huh? Maybe that isn't such a good habit."

"It suits me. Look here, Carlin." Martin's jaw thrust out, a savage intentness leaped in his eyes. "You keep away from my sister-in-law. She's no good. Understand?"

For an instant Carlin was incredulous, could not believe he had heard aright. Then he was aware of two waiters hovering near, and the big Russian bouncer speaking with one of them, apparently casually. Carlin forced a quick smile. His brain worked fast.

"Really?" he said amiably. "Thanks, old man. I appreciated it."

Then, as Martin stared at him, he was out of his chair, with a nod.

"See you again, one of these days," he said, and sauntered off, and out of the place.

His pulses were hammering; this self-control came hard. Yet the trap was all too plain. One blow, and they would have all been on top of him; it would have been a riot. But why, in the devil's name?

HE GLANCED at his watch; eleven-thirty. Shanghai was still dining, for nothing much started here before midnight. It was a late town. No use thinking about seeing her. He knew she was attending a dance in the French Concession with Captain Duquesne of the Tirailleurs. Suddenly, impulsively, he beckoned a rickshaw and climbed in.

He left his rickshaw at the side of the little church, went to Father Healy's dark quarters, and pressed the bell steadily. An overhead light was switched on. After a moment Father Tim threw open the door.

"What d'ye mean getting me out of bed in the middle of the night? Come in."

"The night hasn't started yet," Carlin retorted. "Anyhow, you were reading in bed."

"True for you. Anything wrong?"

"Yes, but I don't know what."

They sat in the study and had a drink together. Carlin came quickly enough to the point of his unseasonable visit.

"You said something the other day that tells me you know the answer to a question."

"To several that would do a graceless blackguard like you a world of good. What is it, then?"

"Why would Jimmy Martin try to pick a fight with me, in public?"

Father Tim grunted. He was blunt, square-faced, sharp of eye.

"Go on with the rest of it. About what?"

"His sister-in-law."

The other sighed, compressed his lips, and shoved his empty glass aside.

"The scoundrel! So that's his game, is it?" said he, and then checked himself, and looked hard at Carlin. "What happened?"

"He expected me to resent what he said about her. I don't like to give a man what he's looking for."

"Thank heaven you had that much sense, me lad."

"Well, why? Will you answer my question?"

"I will not. Have you any right to ask it?"

"No, I suppose not—"

"Has she asked you to interest yourself in her business?"

"No—"

"Then mind your own," said Father Tim without compromise. "But I'll tell you something; and you never knew me to lay my tongue to any man, or call any

man purely bad. But this man Martin comes close to it, from what you've told me this night."

This checked Carlin and showed him the truth. Father Tim did know something; a good deal; perhaps everything.

"The rascal tipped his hand this night," went on Father Tim musingly. "So that's the way of it, eh? Well, well—have another drop."

"No more, thanks; I have work to do." Carlin met the keen, shrewd eyes. "If you think you'll keep me on the outside, you're mistaken."

"It's not my affair if you make a fool of yourself. I warned you, the first day you asked me about her. I still warn you. It's not your business; stay out. Get into this and you're far over your depth."

"In which case I'll try diving," and Carlin chuckled. "Good night! Sorry I routed you out; at least, we're squared away."

Father Tim grunted.

Carlin went back to the hotel, whacked out a story on the Communist uprising in the west, put it into cable-ese, filed it and went to bed early for Shanghai.

CARLIN had done favors for many people, white and yellow. One of these was Lim Erh Sun, nominally a *shroff* for a Chinese banker in the native city. That banker was actually under Lim's thumb, and so were others, for Lim was an organizer. He had come up from Yunnan, he had no respect for gods or devils, and secret societies with borrowed Masonic ritual and a red political future sprang up like poppies wherever he wandered. He was a young man, too, speaking no English but quite fluent French.

In the morning, Carlin went and had a talk with him. Lim grinned happily.

"You will not be sorry that you kept me out of jail last year. A good deed is like a stone dropped in water; one never knows where the ripples will reach. Give me one day, two days. You will hear from me. Your telephone number?"

This promised well. However, when Carlin got back to the hotel and encountered Agnes Sartain in the lobby, he received new cause for puzzled dismay.

She refused flatly to take an upriver trip on a destroyer, which Carlin had been at great pains to arrange with the proper parties. He could read a helpless torment in her eyes, but she still refused. He knew instinctively that she liked him. He had the feeling that she longed to put her face against his shoulder and enjoy a good cry; but her words stung and burned him.

"I don't think it would be a wise thing, Mr. Carlin. If you don't mind, I'd rather not accept any invitations."

"But—good lord!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "There's nothing wrong in it! If there were—"

"You wouldn't have asked me. I know that," she said, unsmiling. "Various matters have come up, which make any more gadding about impossible. I've already accepted an invitation for tonight, and fear I shan't be able to break it. I'm sorry."

She passed on, with a cool nod and heartbreak in her eyes.

Some connection here with Father Tim Healy, with their talk of last night; Carlin could sense it. Accepting no more invitations—why? Clear enough. Father Tim's hand showed here. Looking after her, Carlin saw her meet Captain Duquesne, saw the Frenchman bow gallantly over her fingers; with a subdued drumfire of oaths, he sought the elevators.

But, that afternoon, Carlin had a visitor. It was Lim Erh Sun, who accepted a drink and a cigarette, and with suave urbanity proceeded to let a surprising cat out of the bag. He was willing to tell Carlin things he would have discussed with no one else.

"First, M'soo Martin is going to Del Monte's tonight, and has ordered a taxicab to call for him at eleven," he said in his throaty French. "He did this after learning that some French officers are giving a dinner party there."

The Santa Monica Cloisters employed

only Chinese taxi dancers, which might well explain some of Lim's knowledge. Del Monte's? An extremely respectable dining place with the best of native foods. Was Duquesne giving a party there—was this the invitation she was unable to break? Very likely, thought Carlin. His informant went on, smoothly.

"M'soo Martin lives in the French concession; the Villa Les Mimosas. His wife died a year or more ago; there is a child named Jeanne. I have had a long talk with his Number One Boy. A White Russian woman lives with him now."

"Eh?" said Carlin. "With the Number One Boy?"

Lim Erh Sun grinned. "No, with M'soo Martin. The child is two years old now and the White Russian woman looks after her."

"What? You mean—?"

"Oh, she is a nice woman; there is no scandal at all," Lim returned easily. "All men like to keep White Russian girls if they have no wives, or even if they have wives. I am really surprised that you—but never mind. The important thing is M'soo Martin's Number One Boy. He is president of the Red Lotus brotherhood, and an important person."

Lim scrutinized his cigarette and went on to say that the situation was unjust.

"What's unjust?" said Carlin, remembering that he dealt with the Oriental mind.

"That M'soo Martin should interfere with the business of his Number One Boy, and the legal profits. It is most unjust. I fear M'soo Martin must be turned into an example, or there will be no money in secret societies any more."

"Oh, quite so," Carlin said affably. "But in this case—"

"Well, this Number One Boy for the past year has guided the Red Lotus Brotherhood with great precision, as the leading wild goose guides the whole flock through the sky. He has enjoyed an absolute monopoly on all happy dust in Shanghai. But now M'soo Martin, working through his woman and the big colony of White Russians, has established contact with the Japanese successfully, and is himself distributing happy dust at cut rates. It is most unjust. If M'soo Martin troubles you, I do not think he will trouble you much longer."

Here was enlightenment with a vengeance!

Happy dust—cocaine, morphine and such stuff. Martin had become allied with the Japs and was handling their dope. Something else was explained here; the savage words of Father Tim. The man was flooding Shanghai with drugs. Most of the bedeviled Russians were drug fiends, also.

CARLIN got rid of his visitor. He was rather startled at the information he had just obtained. Jimmy Martin had bucked a bad combination, probably without knowing it. His own Number One Boy headed a secret society with a prior monopoly on the drug traffic. No white man in China knows what his own servants are, outside his compound; or if he knows, is probably quite surprised.

Well, that was Martin's business. What about Agnes Sartain?

Carlin groped desperately. Her sister had been Martin's wife. What on earth was there to explain the attitude of Martin toward her? Nothing, that he could see; it was a mystery. But the attitude remained.

Here things could be pierced together. "So that's his game!" had said Father Tim, who clearly knew a lot. And suddenly Agnes Sartain was accepting no invitations. What was his game? Why, to be publicly insulting, to make some sort of scene involving her, even to heap her with calumny. Whatever his reason, that must be what the man was up to. And now he was going to Del Monte's tonight. She, no doubt, was to be there. What the devil! Why, the girl ought to be warned! Or, better yet—

"By God, it's worth a try anyhow!"

muttered Carlin, and caught up his telephone.

He reserved a table for two at Del Monte's for ten that evening. Inquiry elicited that Captain Duquesne was dining there with a party. Then he was right! He had no more doubts that he was right.

Later in the day he ran into Fred Fluery, who was U.S. marshal in these parts of the infidels, and casually asked him to dinner that night. Fred gave him a slow, whimsical glance.

"Sure; what's the gag, you angle-faced imp? Last time I went out with you, we slid into that scrap between the Limey and Dago outfits, and damned near got killed. What's due to break tonight?"

"Nothing, honest," said Carlin, laughing. "That is, nothing I'm certain about."

Fred grunted skeptically.

They reached Del Monte's about ten-thirty, and Carlin found he had a side table that was by no means conspicuous, which suited him perfectly. Another table was conspicuous, however. A big table, glittering with French uniforms and evening gowns, gay with champagne and a birthday cake. So this was why she had been unable to get out of it—a birthday party! She was there, with Duquesne.

The time dragged. Eleven came and passed. Suddenly Carlin turned. He caught sight of Jimmy Martin coming in, pausing, impatiently waving aside waiters, all attention focussed on that gay party.

A thrill lifted through Carlin's veins as he sighted that intent, savagely resolute look in Martin's face. He knew instantly that his wildest conclusions had hit the mark. Even if he were wrong—well, it would matter little. After all, he had a score of his own to settle with this man.

Then Martin was striding across the floor toward the birthday party, and Carlin came straight up out of his chair. He moved swiftly, disregarding Fred Fleury's surprised exclamation.

Martin halted behind Captain Duquesne's chair and was tapping the Frenchman on the shoulder. Agnes Sartain was looking up, white-faced. The others were staring at Martin.

"Look here," Martin was saying in French. "I want to tell you something about this woman—"

Then Carlin caught Jimmy Martin's arm and swung him around. His words lashed swiftly into the other's speech and broke it off. His voice was loud, angry.

"I've been looking for you, Martin! I hear you're going around saying that my last news story was a fake and I was bribed to send it in. So?"

An utterly false pretense.

THE savage eyes widened on Carlin in sudden amazement and fury. Before Jimmy Martin could speak, Carlin struck him in the mouth—a hard rap. Struck him again in the same place and sent him staggering with bleeding lips. Martin lost his head and flung himself forward with waving fists; too late. Waiters and bouncers came between them. Jimmy Martin, bellowing oaths, was rushed out of the place.

With a shrug, Carlin submitted to ejection, and after a little found himself out in the street, with Fred Fleury beside him.

"What the hell! Why pick on Jimmy Martin? He wasn't aiming for you."

"Lost my head," said Carlin.

"Hm! I know you too well. This'll be all over town in no time. Why couldn't you wait till we'd finished dinner? Fine guy, you are."

"Just for that, come on to the Cathay bar and provide me with the dope for a human interest story on the duties of a U.S. marshal in Shanghai."

"All right. Better fix up bail, too; you'll be in court tomorrow for assault."

"Not a chance," Carlin said. And he was right.

He felt distinctly happy. Whether his guess as to Martin's intent had been right or wrong—and he was confident it had been right—he had neatly blocked the man.

He got his story from Fred; and later, in the shank of the evening, caught an interview on the fly with a Canadian judge who was visiting Shanghai. This was in the big lobby of the hotel.

Agnes Sartain came in with Duquesne, and Carlin quite lost track of what the Canadian jurist was saying. In fact, he ended the interview in mid-career.

Captain Duquesne bent over her slim fingers and departed. She went to the newsstand and had just bought a newspaper when Carlin came up and spoke.

"Good evening! Have you any objection to giving me a few minutes?"

"None." She looked him in the eyes, her gaze searching, troubled, tormented. With a gesture, she led the way to an unoccupied corner. When Carlin had held a match to her cigarette, she looked him in the eyes again, with one word. "Well?"

"You look lovelier than ever tonight," he said cheerfully. She frowned. Obviously, she had for some reason set herself against him. Carlin felt a frantic impulse to stake everything on one throw, and yielded to it.

"I don't like flattery, Mr. Carlin, especially when it doesn't ring true."

"Right," he said, and lost his smile. "I'm afraid we're getting nowhere. Aren't you going to thank me?"

Her eyes dilated. Her face whitened suddenly. He knew, in a flash, that he had broken through her armor. His guess, there in Del Monte's, had been right.

"Oh! Then—that scene—it wasn't accidental!" came her staccato accents.

"No."

Carlin knew it was touch and go now. He must go on and gamble high, throw discretion and breeding and common sense and courtesy to the winds, pitch all convention overboard and plunge! He even borrowed Jane Hopper's words.

"I haven't any right to intrude into your private affairs; but it's not mere curiosity. I'd like to be friends with you, more than anyone I know. Yes, there's trouble and a lot of it. I don't know all the details, but that rotter must be choked off somehow. Will you give me a chance to help?"

HER first surprise died. She gave him a thoughtful nod.

"It's no secret, I suppose, any more. It's about little Jeanne, of course."

"Of course," repeated Carlin vaguely, but with prompting encouragement.

"You see, after my sister passed away, mother and I wanted to take Jeanne, but he wouldn't let us. Then we heard from Captain Duquesne, my cousin, about the conditions under which the poor child was living. I came to do something about it. I had to, you see."

It burst upon Carlin in a flash of clarity. The child, of course! Lim Erh Sun had laid some stress on that child. Agnes Sartain went on quietly.

"I told him he must give up Jeanne to me, and he wouldn't listen; he flew into a rage. Finally we had it out, and he threatened me. He said he'd make me glad to get out of here and stop interfering in his business; he said he'd fix things so no court would give Jeanne to me. Father Healy tried to help, and Martin was even uglier to him."

Carlin laughed softly.

"So that's it! He tried his game with me but didn't get far, luckily. It wouldn't take much to make a lot of talk in this town—ugly talk. Ugly is the word for it, yes. Look here, Miss Sartain; if anything more turns up, if you need a hand, will you give me a call? This business may be worse than you realize. Martin is involved in the dope game; and it's a pretty risky game in these parts. There's no law, as we know it. If anything turns up, do call me in. Let me help."

Frankly said, honestly meant. Her face warmed a little. Her hand came out to him.

"Thank you, Mr. Carlin. I don't think anything much will come up now; I seem to be pretty helpless. But I'll remember your kindness. Good night."

Carlin went to his room, frowning. Yes, she was up against it properly. Once Martin got her talked about, she'd have

little chance of doing anything legally; she had little enough as it was. He could imagine that Martin would be savagely devoted to the child.

His thoughts went back to that silky, smooth, infernal Lim Erh Sun. Not so nice for Jimmy Martin, this situation; the native gangs were organized and were powerful, and they stopped at nothing. They had taken over the American snatch methods and operated almost openly; no Chinese merchant was safe from kidnapping. It was notorious and blatant. And where the dope game was concerned, the sky was the limit.

Carlin growled an oath. Who was right, in this affair? Agnes Sartain wanted her sister's child, wanted to take little Jeanne from this atmosphere of vice, as she quite naturally regarded it, and give the kid a new future, a decent one. She thought of Martin's kept woman acting in place of a mother gave her the shivers.

It was equally natural that Jimmy Martin should object, to the point of fighting for his child with any dirty weapon that came to hand, and the dirtier the better. There was no excuse for Martin, of course; and yet Carlin could scarcely find blame in his heart for the man. Here was a new light on the affair. Martin, no doubt, blindly figured on making a big cleanup with his drug traffic and then clearing out of China for good. To him, this woman would be a vicious interloper; his child, something to be fought for without gloves. That type of man usually was a possessive father.

Carlin jumped as his telephone rang.

"Oh, please!" His pulses hammered. It was her voice. "Can you come down to the lobby quickly, at once? I'll meet you there. I need you——"

"On the jump, you bet!" exclaimed Carlin. "Be right down."

He looked at his watch, and whistled. Late, even for Shanghai; what the devil was up, at this hour of the morning? Lucky thing he had not undressed yet. He struggled into his coat, caught up his hat, and dashed for the elevator.

She had been ahead of him, despite his haste. She rose from her seat as he strode toward her; the lobby was nearly empty. Carlin repressed an oath at sight of her face. White as death, with heart-hurried eyes. She spoke jerkily.

"I'm sorry—it's something terrible. I don't know just what. We must go and get little Jeanne at once. He's telephoned for that—that Russian woman to dress her and let me take her. Will you go with me, please? You said——"

"Sure thing," exclaimed Carlin. "Was it Martin who telephoned you?"

"Yes. He—he's at the Cloisters. I'll explain as we go."

Carlin went outside on the jump, whistling shrilling for a taxi.

Meantime, in the office room behind the Santa Monica Cloisters, was an empty desk piled with coin and banknotes and checks; the evening's take. The Chinese girls, the waiters, the staff, had departed. The place was dark, save for this office in the rear with barred windows and frosted glass.

Two Chinese sat there now before the desk, smoking Martin's cigars and sipping Martin's private stock of champagne. They were nattily dressed in suits of white tussore silk and panamas from Manila; each

with a very ugly automatic pistol in his lap. They quite disdained the heaps of money on the table.

ONE of them was Lim Erh Sun; the other was his assistant, in the art of organizing celestial brotherhoods. They were both in high spirits, as they smoked, chatted, and sent occasional glances at the locked door of the closet in the corner.

Inside that closet, Jimmy Martin leaned against the wall in the darkness, no longer arrogant and blatant and domineering; instead, blood ran down his cheek from the cut that a whack with a blackjack had given him, and his breath came whistling on the wings of suppressed groans.

He had finished talking, and hung up the receiver. It was not generally known that he had a telephone in that closet; he was not supposed to have a telephone at all, indeed. When one has entered into alliance with Japanese, however, the old order changeth even in Shanghai, and a strictly private telephone is an useful adjunct.

A step sounded in the office outside his prison door. The accents of Lim Erh Sun came to him in throaty French, mocking him lightly.

"Be at ease, good host; we have just sent away the other two men. It has been decided to postpone the settlement with you for a little, until your child arrives. A lovely little girl, m'soo! I am sure that when she comes to persuade you, it will be evident what a charming spirit of accommodation dwells within your heart."

The steps withdrew, amid laughter.

Jimmy Martin cursed viciously. He tried once more; in vain. At this hour he could not reach his Japanese friends. He could reach Agnes Sartain, and had reached her, with utter frantic despair in his heart. He could reach the police if he so desired, but he knew better. What he needed, what he must have if it killed him, was secret swift action. By the time he finished explanations to the police, it would be too late to save Jeanne and he would certainly die when Lim Erh Sun had to run from the arriving rescuers.

Not that he mattered, anyway. He was no longer thinking of himself. If Agnes picked up Jeanne in time, these devils would be blocked; then he could deal with them, yield everything, save his neck at least. But he had heard stories of how Chinese could torture children; the recollection sapped his very marrow and drew another groan from him.

He tried again to get his Japanese number. His voice rose shrilly as he argued with the operator. So shrilly that it reached the men outside. The closet door was suddenly unlocked and flung open. Martin glimpsed the two yellow faces, snarling with alarm and furious dismay. Frantic, he tore loose the receiver in his hand and hurled it at them with spasmodic force, just as the pistols exploded.

The edge of the thing struck Lim Erh Sun squarely on the temple. The chief organizer, without a sound, crumpled to the floor. His assistant stooped over him for an instant and then, with a bleat of alarm, leaped up and darted out of the place. But no one followed him.

In the darkness before the dawn, the taxicab halted before the Villa Les Mimosas and Carlin jumped out. He had already seen that the bungalow was lighted up.

"Better let me run in; you wait here," he said. "We'll bring the kid out."

Without waiting for Agnes Sartain to assent, he darted in through the gate and up the steps, and hammered at the door. The servants would be gone at this hour, of course. But the Russian woman——

His thoughts checked and dissipated like smoke. He caught sounds from within; the thudding feet, a shrill high cry, instinct with terror. He tried the door and it was locked. At this instant he saw that the long French window to the right of him stood wide open. He turned and went for it with a leap, and was inside.

The lights guided him, and a spat of vicious voices. He flung himself into another room where a light burned, a hallway beyond that, and so to a bedroom, bursting into it headlong. There he halted, as the picture hit him full force.

A woman in filmy night dress, frozen terrified, hands outspread against a wall. One Chinese had a knife at her breast, holding her motionless. In the corner a crib with a child standing in it, half dressed, gurgling delightedly. And, reaching for the child, another Chinese. All this in a flashing instant, a flickering breath of time. Then Carlin was at them, and they whirling to face him, and the woman suddenly screaming like mad.

The steel glinted for him, the snarling slit-eyed faces rushed for him. Carlin's boot crunched home and one of the two yapped like a hurt dog, dropped knife, went down in agonized collapse. The other knife slid in—no evading it. Carlin took it in his left arm, warding the thrust. He felt leaping agony as the blade sliced home and was wrenched free again. The woman was gone now, running out of the room, a scream trailing from her lips like fire from a torch.

Again the long knife drove at him. Carlin somehow fended the blow and got his fist smack into the yellow face. The Chinese staggered; Carlin leaped, hurled himself full weight at the man, caught the knife-wrist and bore the fellow backward. They crashed to the floor together, and the skull of the Chinese made a dull, queer sound as it hit the foot of the big iron bed. He lay relaxed, unmoving.

Carlin sprang up and glanced at the first man, who still writhed helpless. Pain was stabbing up his arm, blood sticky on his hand. He swung around to the crib. The child standing there reached out to him, eyes bright with instinct fear.

"Take me!" piped the treble voice. "Take me quick!"

A laugh broke from Carlin. "Sure thing, sister! Hop aboard, Jeanne—"

With his unhurt arm he gathered up the eager child and started for the door. He reached it, passed it, and almost collided with Agnes Sartain. Wide-eyed, she caught the little figure from him.

"That woman!" she panted. "Screaming—what's happened?"

Carlin met her gaze. She had not glimpsed his red-soaked arm, had not seen the room behind him. Outside, the street was bursting with life and voices.

"Just broke up the kidnap gang," he said. He kissed her on the lips; then turned her and started her out.

"Get back to the car and wait for me. Got to cover this story. The cops will be here in a minute."

She was gone. Whistles and voices and pounding feet grew louder, were in the house. The police would be here in a moment, yes; and a damned good thing too, thought Carlin as he clutched his throbbing arm and waited.

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Two Men of the Miller Trucking and Bus Outfit Try—

WORKING FOR THE RAILROAD

By KERRY RALSTON

Author of "Listen Bozo," etc.

"BROKEN axle," repeated Fyler. "Wait where you are. I'll have a man there in an hour and a half. Transfer your passengers to Sixty-Eight, Coach Nine-Seventeen. In about twenty minutes." He flipped a sheet, reaching for a second phone while still talking into the first. "Still raining there?"

Old Man Miller bent to catch the reply, too, as it came faintly from the receiver, blended with intermittent crackling and a steady sizzle, as though the elements had soaked into dreary intervening miles of wires.

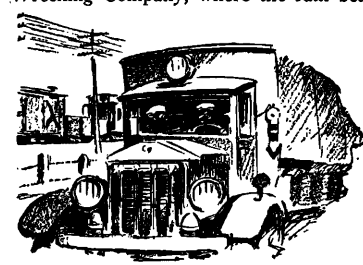
"—can't see a hundred feet. Heard there's a washout on the railroad."

"Wash-out, eh?" grumbled Miller. "Well, we're running a bus-line. What happens to the railroad is no gnats in my gruel. Long as nobody's hurt they can have two-three wash-outs. Get McCorkle out there to weld Sixty-four. Better send a boy along with him."

Since Fyler already was doing it, Miller closed his angular jaws on the debris of a cigar, poked his bony hands deeper into warm pockets and strolled to a window.

Just looking out at it gave him the blues—made him feel like turning up his coat collar and pulling his hat down over his ears.

The weather, of course, couldn't come in. Architects had designed the brown brick office and depot of the Transcontinental Transportation for permanence, with a good roof, adequate guttering and a steam heating system. Decorators had added plush carpets, mahogany and plate glass. Miller himself lent it personality. But it still lacked something of the old back shop of the Miller Garage & Wrecking Company, where the rain beat



down right over your head and quite often came through. It lulled one into a false sense of security.

Miller made a round and dropped into a chair again.

"Better keep on the wire up and down the line, Les," he said. "This is November and if it turns colder and starts to freeze it'll be a regular fender-bender."

DOWN in the cavernous bus sheds Tim McCorkle was inspecting a pair of oilskins in preparation for a seventy mile run out into the rain. The truck he would drive bore the simple legend, J. Miller & Company, and it was policy to repair on the spot rather than tow. Railroads burn their wreckage to get it out of sight; human beings bury their dead, as do likewise the lowly ants. Even mild horror must be hidden; certainly never advertised.

McCorkle himself was a short, heavy, round and red-faced man, possessing no outstanding feature and but one salient characteristic. This was silence. Where the parts of speech were concerned, McCorkle was a hide-bound conservative. He conserved sound almost to the utter extermination thereof. Records showed that only upon one occasion had McCorkle really expressed himself. It was a tremendous effort of seventeen and a half words, and he had been ill in the hospital for nearly a week afterward.

He was about to swing into the cab when a thick voice arrested him.

"Hist, lad. Ye should not go alone in such stormy weather. Bide a minute while I get me slicker, an' I'll join ye. I have nothing to do anyway save kill time, an' the wench has a cat's nine lives tonight."

"Hump," muttered McCorkle, but waited nevertheless. Donald McDonovan Donahue was one Scotchman for whom he had no affection whatsoever; in fact, for the first five years they had fought periodically all over the lot. The encounters resembled the famous meeting of irresistible force and immovable object. Of recent years, however, dislike had merely been passive.

Though McCorkle chose silence for himself, he held no objection to palaver in others, and Donahue was by way of being a bright conversationalist. And perhaps it was better not to go alone.

Donahue was gone rather long and when finally he came he had donned the slicker for reasons of his own. His person, without it, would have shown bulges. "Aboard," he sang out, swinging up, and they pulled out beneath the upper windows of Miller's and the dispatcher's office, already brightly lighted and sparkling with rain.

"'Twill need a steady hand upon the reins o' commerce this night, lad," Donahue observed, with an accent which grew thicker with the years. "'Tis the kind of night callin' for the soothin' solace of good whiskey in inexhaustible quantity. Which will ye have, Mister McCor-rkle? Rye or Scotch?"

"Rye," chose McCorkle promptly.

With the heater on, the cab became quite cozy, and Donahue presently remembered the radio. Finally he could resist no longer the urge to sing with it.

"Tra-la-la, vo-dee-o-do — do ye not think I have a fairish baritone voice, eh, McCorkle, m'lad?"

"'S putrid," opined McCorkle, with candor and brevity.

FIRM hands meanwhile directed the flow of commerce, at least as far as the Transcontinental was concerned. Miller was pacing up and down the floor of his Traffic Chief's office, stopping now and again to peer out at a thermometer mounted on the outside of one of the windows. Six more degrees would stiffen water into ice, and the glass still fell. A few miles west it might already be freezing.

"Heard some geese going over last night," he remarked to Fyler. "Well, what have you got?"

"That rail wash-out," Fyler said, looking up with his one good eye, "was at White Junction. And they have another

near Baldwin, with two trains dead between them."

"Sad," observed Miller, without much grief. "Well, it's an ill wind. Find out what's going on up and down their line and act accordingly. Get our service department busy among the wholesale houses. We ought to do a thousand dollars worth of perishable freight business out there in the next few days. What else?"

"A convention at Davisville, and a road show stranded at Union City."

"Road show, eh? They ought to like to walk. They call 'em hoofers. Put on a couple of extra sections, and warn our agent not to take any checks."

"Just a minute—"

Moisture, perhaps, was making the air a good conductor. It certainly had become electric as Fyler manipulated his switchboard keys. "What's that—wreck—hello—yes—yes—dispatcher—"

Wreck—that lurking, omnipresent spectre, wreck!

"Where?" demanded Miller.

"Just a minute — yes — right — O.K. Flash all passings until daylight. Get me a report as soon as you can."

"Hell!" swore Miller. "Can't you talk?"

"Train wreck," Fyler explained. "On the bridge at Montgomery. Nothing of ours."

Miller began to breathe again. "Anybody hurt?"

"No report. That was one of the dead trains, between Baldwin and—"

"Oh, I get it. A wreck between two wash-outs. How'll they bring in a wrecker? Well, they just won't. That S.S. & St. P. bridge at Montgomery—I wouldn't even want to walk across it. They say she sags three inches under a freight engine."

"Under load all bridges sag a little. They're built that way. Hello—yes—never mind it, operator—dispatcher's office—yes—right. Thanks." And over his shoulder, "Ice forming at Hilldale."

Miller just stared unseeing out into the rain. Where would McCorkle be now? Comparing his watch with the dispatcher's clock for the fourth time within fifteen minutes, Miller decided that McCorkle would be nearing Montgomery. Well, wherever he was it was a swell night. "One swell night," Miller repeated under his breath.

TWIN wipers methodically ticked across a flooded front glass, and a great engine sang beneath the hood. Sixty miles into the teeth of a freshening northwest gale, Miller's two men, by now in a mood verging upon mellow, found no legitimate fault with the evening as the sullen dusk surrendered to sodden night. To all practical purpose it was dark as they nosed out on the highway bridge at Montgomery. Then for one brief instant, as the distant storm bank maneuvered for new offense, day made a fleeting farewell appearance.

Donahue had just wiped his side window clear of steam and was looking upriver as the sickened sun burst through. Startled, he mouthed his words, almost speaking too late.

"Hoot—yon bridge! *Look!*"

And McCorkle looked. Then the clouds closed.

"If something has not gone wrong on the bridge me name is not Donahoo!"

"Uh," McCorkle agreed.

Donahue snapped his watch. "It's not late. The last train wreck I had the good

fortune to view was all of three years ago. A circus train, it was, with hordes of screechin' monkeys and a Fat Lady o' about a quarter ton averdupois, named Missis McGonicle." He sighed. "La. This Missis McGonicle was subject to vapors and a tendency to faint with frequency along the right of way. An' believe me, lad, when she went down 'twas no small task setting her up vertical again with dignity an' decorum. We'll turn right here, eh?"

Being host to a full quota of curiosity of his own, McCorkle turned right, stopping when the street ended at the railroad embankment.

Here they got out and climbed. There was a heavy drizzle, but not enough to call yet for the oilskins, though people up on top all had umbrellas up as they milled about in the dazed light of a few track flares.

Rails stretched briefly into the mist, already beginning to rust. The red lamps out on the stranded train, the people, the atmosphere itself bred a feel of chill dread, of hushed wet expectancy.

Someone turned on a focused light. "You can see how it's hanging, Mr. Benton.

"The fore-end is clear over with the truck dangling by its chains. Every time the wind rises the whole thing rocks. She's balanced now, but if this drizzle begins to freeze the ice will add to the weight of the long end and over she'll go."

"Then uncouple and let it go."

"All the crew on God's earth couldn't pull the pin out of her with the strain on it. That's all that's holding her up. When she does go she may take the next blind along—maybe the whole span. It's right at the pier. And no chance of the wrecker, or even a section crew in here before tomorrow night."

"But my God, man! Can't you get a chain on it, or something?"

"I wouldn't get near that car for a thousand dollars, Mr. Benton. Nor anybody else with good sense. Not until the crane gets here. I tell you," he cried hoarsely, "you can feel it rock! And it's beginning to freeze right now!"

"Losh," said Donahue softly to McCorkle, "it's what ye'd call an embarrassin' situation combined with hysteria and a spot o' mutiny on the part of the station agent or telegraph operator or whatever his position in life. Personally I'd clap 'em all in the brig. What would ye do, Mister McCorkle?"

"Weld it," said McCorkle shortly.

FROM his pocket Donahue drew a match, putting one end in his mouth and glaring down along his nose at the other in cock-eyed cogitation. "Weld it," he mused. "Aye, a bar of iron would stiffen it better than a chain, no doubt. With a good weld at each end 'twould anchor the buckin' Juggernaut itself. Hist, McCorkle, I scent a bit o' money this night. Ye know who this Benton is? Well, he's one o' the vice-presidents of the road. Old Man Miller knows him well. They have as many vice-presidents as an outcast dog has fleas. But Benton is the head flea, McCorkle, an' speaks with thunderous tones of authority. Have ye never heard a flea thundering?"

McCorkle merely shrugged, but his eyes held a curiously lambent gleam.

Before approaching Benton, Donahue mingled with the crowd, gleaning information. The mishap had been due apparently to a broken guard rail, and the locomotive lay somewhere down in the dark water. Her crew had jumped; been rescued by barge men below. Taxis had brought the passengers across the highway bridge, all having been evacuated through the Pullmans and observation car at the rear. There were numerous contusions and shattered nerves, all of which would be paid for by the railroad according to the sagacity of each plaintiff's legal counsel.

McCorkle, presently seeing his companion sidle up to the vice-president, moved

in closer himself to hear the bargaining. Times there were when the silent little Irishman envied the glib loquacity of the never silent little Scot.

"Beg pardon, Mister Benton," Donahue launched forth respectfully, "but have ye considered weldin' a bar from coach to rail? 'Twould have a stiffening influence better than a chain, and me and me pardner would be willing to undertake the task for a reasonable sum. Considerin' the weather an' the risk I have a hundred an' fifty dollars in mind. It's a modest figure, with results guaranteed."

"Who are you?"

"We're mechanics—er—seekin' employment, ye might say," explained Donahue, deeming it not wise to make true identity known. The plain truck, he remembered, would not give them away. "We have a weldin' outfit in a truck below. Seein'—"

"It sounds crazy to me," a brakeman said.

"Aye, crazy we may be, but no cowards."

"You'll be a coupla dead ducks, brother—"

"There's a hundred thousand dollars worth of rolling stock on that span," snapped the vice-president of the S.S. & St. P. "God knows what's in the express car. If the pier went out there'd be two spans to replace—a quarter of a million besides three months tie up. You—whoever you are—get your man. You'll work for the company under our regular com-

pensation-risk-insurance, during your temporary employment. These people here can witness the oral agreement. And I'll double your price if that's still hanging there when we get the crane in."

His point achieved, Donahue was too astute a salesman to linger. Together Miller's men slid down the bank to the street below.

"Up in town," Donahue suggested, "the streets cross the tracks at grade. We can back down the rails. 'Twill make unloadin' easier on the bridge."

Such was McCorkle's intention. But first he made a stop at a white fronted garage with which Transcontinental had a working agreement, and in a minute came out trundling two tanks. These aboard, he went back for two more.

"It would appear," Donahue commented, "that ye be stocking the vital weldin' gases wi' reckless and profligate abundance, lad. Still, ye doubtless know what ye're about."

In five minutes they were backing down the high, wind-swept rails, a spotlight swung to the rear pointing the way. Donahue rolled down his window at the bridge.

"Ye keep everybody off, mister, under penalty o' death an eternal damnation."

The wind took Benton's words away, and he repeated, shouting, "How long do you think it will take you?"

"All night," McCorkle spoke up with a sudden and unwonted sharpness.

WIND among the skeleton's steel bones throbbed and wailed in agony and the drizzle grew heavier as Donahue crouched on a platform behind a water barrel and lit the last cigarette from a ragged package, then carefully tore off the cellophane to light the torch. From now on it was up to McCorkle.

"From the look an' feel of things yon station man did not exaggerate the gravity of the situation." Donahue put his little finger under the end of the baggage car, which hung out half over a void, and lifted gently. "Losh, it's balanced as nicely as an apothecary's scales. I'll lean on me weight, McCorkle, whilst ye burn a bar to the keel o' her."

The torch began to spit a white heat.

It seemed to take an eternity, but Dona-

hue finally could exhult: "She's done, fair and ship-shape." He was conscious now that he had broken out in a cold sweat, and that there was something more than rain on his face. Sleet!

Having helped McCorkle get the hand-truck from under, Donahue steadied himself with a hand on a brace and peered at the river. The engine was lying down there, cold and black and dead. The corpse of an iron horse.

"If it had to be," he shuddered, but striving for the lighter note, "I hope it was the one which blew a cinder in me eye last Tuesday. Can ye swim, McCorkle? Yon river has a billious an' dropsical look to-night—bein' yellow an' swollen." He clapped his hands to his pockets as an afterthought and added, "Will ye have rye or Scotch, Mister McCorkle?"

It appeared that McCorkle was going to make several more welds in different places. It probably would pay to make things doubly safe. Donahue stood watching the flame fuse the metal; it took a lot of heat, for the whole bridge span was conducting it away. By-and-by he got an inkling of what McCorkle was really doing. He understood, too, why they had stopped to pick up those extra drums. However, he chose to chatter of other things.

"A pretty structure, a bridge, wi' stresses an' strains calculated to a hair's weight. Ha' ye heard the account o' the young engineer fresh from college who designed a bridge across the river? It took a year or more to construct after he had planned it out, an' come the day of the dedication and the mayor was about to cut the silk ribbon with a pair of gilt shears, when *swoosh!* She'd let 'em all doon in the river!

"So the survivors pulled themselves out as wet as drowned rats an' went to find the young architect, along with a bucket of tar an' ample feathers. 'Where is he?' barks the mayor, when the landlady opens the door. 'Which way did he go?'

"She says, 'I don't know where he is, nor which way he went, yer honor. But he took both his suitcases with him, an' the last words I heard him say were, "Damn that blankety-blanked decimal point!" ' "

Dragging the barrow out again without comment, McCorkle began anew. Wherever metal rubbed metal or approached it, McCorkle welded. If the heat dissipation proved too great he brazed. He melted her coupler into a smoking blue lump. Underneath he burned the bar to its slide, and then fused the bolt. He welded the cross-lying truck to its beam and wrapped the chains around the rail, melting them into each other too. Then he went back for a new drum, and Donahue went along, picking up a short pinch bar.

"Ye appear to need no assistance. I'll therefore leave ye to your evil machinations and do a bit o' explorin' myself. Perhaps while I'm gone the point and humor o' the little anecdote I've just related will seep into your astonishin' hard head."

The cat-walk was getting white with sleet as Donahue went along the train's black side, flashing his light upon the gold lettering on each coach as he came to it, and finally beholding the legend: "SNACK CAR."

He put in his bar, gave a quick flip and the vestibule trap bounded up and clicked. "Snack car," he murmured. "Just fancy!"

DONAHUE thereafter was engaged for a while. So long, in fact, that an eighth inch of ice covered the sleet on the broadwalk when he made his way back, clinging to the side of the train to elude a chill and beckoning eternity below.

"La, but it's a filthy night. I see ye have welded her in some seventy-six new places in me absence. It'll take the wreckin' crew two days to get here and a week to leave, more or less, and meanwhile the Old Man will do a pipin' freight business in the vicinity. Which I daresay ye had in the back of your mind all the while. Well, I hope they never catch up with you, Mc-

Corkle. They'll put a bothersome knot o' rope beneath yer left ear an' attach ye to a tall tree."

Taking off his goggles, McCorkle looked up, revealing eyes glassy in the torchlight. "Ha!" was what he said. It was a short note, but wholeheartedly devoted to triumph.

"So ye say," observed Donahue. "Meanwhile I have made discoveries, namely a snack car with snacks all intact, present and accounted for, savin' those which have rendered their final accounting within the cavernous recesses o' me own anatomy. We have baked ham an' bologna sausage and cheeses of all odors from coy to pugnacious. Also a fair find o' bottled goods, though it grieves me to say the bulk of it is mere sliced pickles. Had I known yer preference I'd have constructed ye a sandwich. Will ye have rye or Scotch—er—white bread, McCorkle?"

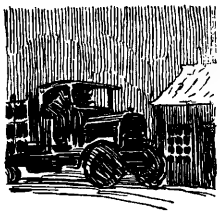
McCorkle cut off the torch.

"Ye prefer to choose for yerself, eh? Well, come along then, man, an' I warn ye the boards are slippery as a greased gut."

WITH Old Man Miller, it had been long standing habit to drop into his office at ten o'clock each night. Fyler had long since gone home, but the regular night dispatcher was on duty, and as Miller came in he looked up, his face wearing worry's mantle.

"What's wrong, son?"

"Sixty-four, coach Ten-ten, Erhart—waiting beyond Montgomery for repairs.



A truck left here at once—five-fifteen—McCorkle up. No report."

"What!"

"I'm getting the O.O. on the Montgomery wire, so it's possible he stranded there. Everything else is clear."

"Did McCorkle go alone?"

The dispatcher twigged his keys and repeated the question. "Sheds think Donahue went with McCorkle, sir."

"Lord," muttered Miller. "What kind of a mess—no reports at all?"

The dispatcher shook his head.

"Then call the shops. Tell them to get my Cadillac in off the street and check everything. Tell them to put a pair of tight chains on her. Borrow me a fleece coat and throw in a first aid kit and a bottle of whiskey. I might meet a snake. And hurry!"

Miller nervously paced the floor while his instructions were being carried out, but at the sound of twin trumpets below he leaped down the stairs.

Seventy gruelling minutes later he pulled up at the white fronted garage where McCorkle had overstocked the vital gases. Here and in town it took the president of Transcontinental about two minutes to coral the sources of information, do simple sums and head for the railroad embankment in the north end.

He struck it at the same street, just off the bridge approach, where McCorkle had alighted and climbed. But Miller did not alight. He put out his head, looked up, shifted to low and tramped on the pedal. The Cadillac went up in a froth of wet chat, bumped over the rear rail and tore off her oil plug on a projecting tie-end. The needle fell off as the fluid gushed out like blood from a gutted whale, but Miller was up, which was all that counted.

Earlier the vice-president of the S. S. & St. P. had gone to a hotel to warm his feet, but he was back now in the lee of a tarp stretched up by the train crew, who were making themselves comfortable about a sheet-iron fire pot. Into the group strode Miller.

"Hello, Benton, you old crook! Where are my two men?"

"Your men—" began Benton, and the

silence was awkward in the extreme. Out on the bridge a light picked up a gleam from the truck's bright work, and the answer to his question. There was a crossfire of question and explanation.

"—but I didn't know they were your men, Miller. If they haven't had an accident they're still out there. We saw the flame for a while, but nobody's seen it for two hours. There's nothing to do now but wait until daylight. The bridge is a solid sheet of ice."

Miller snorted in disgust. "Can't get out, eh? Well, there's a bakery running uptown. Get some ashes in buckets. Lacking buckets, use bread pans. Buy the damned bakery outright. Have you a shovel or two on your railroad? Is there any rip-rap lying loose. Any sand in your section shanties? Got a handcar? Get a crew busy. I'm going out."

A MAN may be born a judge of rye whisky or a leader of men, or both. By being both, Miller had built the biggest truck and bus system in the world. Within five minutes he was out on the bridge over well-sanded ties, turning a light into the deserted cab of his own truck.

To pass it, one had to hang almost overside. Benton nearly balked. The effect of wrecks at close range upon vice-presidents is not salutary.

"It won't fall," jeered Miller, pointing his light at the iron bar which McCorkle had burned on first of all. A bar like that would take a straight load of fifty tons alone. But with uncanny precision, Miller began to pick out other blue spots, now quite cold, where metal had wedded metal. "Lord," he muttered.

He found the couplers, the bars and the beam. They went precariously back along the train. Wherever he could reach them McCorkle had welded the brake-shoes to the wheels and the wheels to both rail and guard on opposite sides. A cutting torch wasn't going to do much good breaking things loose unless they cut the span up in small pieces, each with a fragment of train attached. He even had the mail hooks swung out and fused to the arch. Spot welds on brakes rendered them ineffective, except to lock them with bull dog tenacity. A neat spot weld secured each door against intrusion forevermore.

"It's a damned plot," cried Benton hoarsely.

Miller cocked his head to one side. "Melodrama, Benton? Well, I didn't have anything to do with it. He probably saved your train and your bridge. There's no doubt it would have knocked the main support of the span if it had pulled that second car over. He's got 'em united tighter than matrimony. Unholy bonds of brass and iron. Hum. Getting poetic in my old age. Where are those boys; that's what I want to know?

"I'll ruin you for this, Miller. We'll sue you for the biggest damages in the history of transportation!"

"Yeah; history's been made all right. But you hired 'em in the presence of witnesses, so you told me. Those men couldn't be eligible for double compensation under the present insurance set-up. When you hired them they quit working for me. If you don't believe me, go ask the Insurance Commissioner. About all I see for you to do is dynamite this mess and then build yourself a nice new bridge without any train sticking to it. Here's the torch. They quit working right here."

Three coaches further back a hatch was up, and Miller stopped, sniffing. "Now," he announced, "we're getting somewhere." And he crawled through.

Someone behind him, the brakeman probably, found the light switches in their cubby-hole. And a voice came to them, whispering excitedly.

"Hist, McCorkle. Get up, man. It's Miller himself!"

"DRUNK!" roared Miller. "Soused to the ears! Lit up like lords. Get up, you hellions!"

Donahue was already wide awake and frightened, but McCorkle had been working hard and genuine fatigue underlay the alcoholic veneer. He lay on the bar top with his corduroy cap over his eyes. He had his cut-out open, and he was vibrating badly.

"Whose bright idea was this?" demanded Miller savagely.

Had Miller not sounded quite so hostile, Donahue might have claimed the honor himself. Under the circumstances he decided to give the right devil his dues. He jerked a thumb at McCorkle. "If ye entertain the notion, even briefly, that I'd countenance such irregular proceedings—"

"Shut up," snapped Miller. "So he thought it up himself, eh? Well, what do you know about that!" He paused, surveying the sleeping McCorkle. His whole manner changed. His tone, as he went on, was almost affectionate. "Did you hear that, Benton? He thought it up all by himself. Of course, I'll have to dock the two of them as a matter of principle for not attending to duty first. One of my drivers has been waiting out on the road for repairs for six hours. He ought to slay the pair of 'em. But I won't let him. I need men like that in my organization. I don't care much for—er—plough horses. My men are all race horses, Benton."

"A couple of drunken Irishmen—"

Donahue bristled. "My own blood," he declared, "is of the purest Highland strain, uncontaminated with the vile juice o' shanty Irish. In five hundred years there has never been a railroad man in my family, I'll have ye know."

"Shut up," ordered Miller. "See if you can bring him to. Let's get out of here. The reporters will be wanting to talk to him. He'll be famous."

So Donahue tried to arouse McCorkle. He became almost eloquent.

"Losh! Did ye hear that, lad? Ye're famous already to-night, besides bein' wealthy. 'Bus driver saves bridge! Clings to ice-coated iron at midnight.' Can ye not vision the headlines? Come, come, fame is knockin' at yer door. Will ye let the lady cool her heels? Ye can't be drunk an' famous at the same time. Wake up I tell ye.

"Tut, the pity of it! Me hear-rt bleeds. Poor deluded black sheep. Utter misguided an' sodden wretch!"

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Adventurers All

Alone With the Moneybag

I WAS engaged in an engineering project in one of the provinces of Luzon, Philippine Islands. One of my duties was to go twice a month to the bank in Manila to get cash for the payroll and to carry it back to the provincial town where I boarded and from there out to the job three miles across country.

The payroll amounted to around $5,000; a lot of money for one man to be carrying about, but while petty thieving was common enough in the Islands, robbery on a big scale wasn't, and up to that day at the beginning of the rainy season, I had felt no qualms in making my trips and in going unarmed and unguarded.

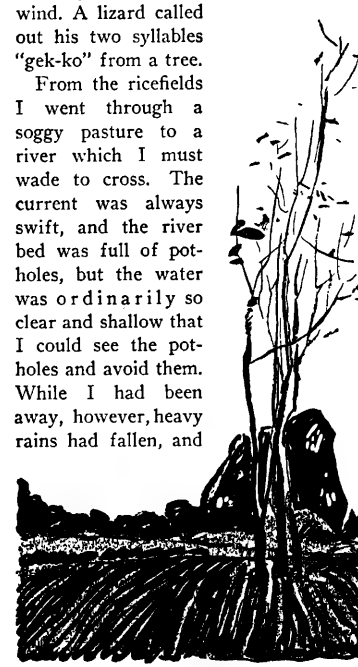
On this particular occasion, however, when after my return from Manila I stopped at my boarding house to change my clothes before I set out afoot, my landlady told me excitedly that there had been two robberies in the neighborhood the night before and that a man had been almost beaten to death. She urged me not to take the trip without a constabulary guard.

Well, I was in a hurry to get back on the job; I thought that the landlady's account of the robberies had probably lost nothing in the telling, and then, I told myself, while robbers might be bold enough to attack a man at night, they would hardly be bold enough to attack him in broad daylight in open country.

So I started out with my moneybag alone.

The train, an hour behind schedule, made me later than usual in starting, and once on the way I found going slow, as the rains had made the ground sticky.

I went half a mile down the country road, then cut across the ricefields, walking on the narrow dikes between the paddies. I saw no one. Twilight fell, throwing a great purple canopy across the sky. From the clumps of bamboo came the creaking of the joints swayed by the wind. A lizard called out his two syllables "gek-ko" from a tree.



From the ricefields I went through a soggy pasture to a river which I must wade to cross. The current was always swift, and the river bed was full of potholes, but the water was ordinarily so clear and shallow that I could see the potholes and avoid them. While I had been away, however, heavy rains had fallen, and

I found the river seething and running high with muddy water that hid the potholes.

The daylight was fast fading out. I looked at the river, looked at and felt of my moneybag. The water swished, as masses of water plants and an occasional log tumbled past. I looked at the bank, checking as best I could the rise of the water. It had not risen as much as I had at first estimated, and would perhaps reach no higher than my waist at the deepest parts. But the potholes. I couldn't see to avoid them through the brown water, and I was no expert swimmer. I dared not risk my life trying to cross. Also, I hardly dared turn back, striking out across lonely ricefields in the dark where robbers might be waiting for me. I found footing on a rock that stuck up out of the mud and for a few minutes stood trying to decide what was best to do. All about me were the queer sounds of the tropical night, geckos, creaking bamboos, cries of coconut bats.

Well, the river bank wasn't any safer than the fields. There was no place for me to hide. I must start back. But just as I was about to take my first step, I heard a new sound, human voices chattering in a language that I had never heard before. Peering through the half darkness, I saw on top of a small hill close on one side of me fifteen or twenty negritoes, the diminutive wild primitives of the island, who wander about in the hills without any fixed home; who are noted for their deadly aim with bow and arrow. From their vantage point they began laughing gleefully, staring down at me, pointing. One of them held an arrow in his hand. I was trapped, at their mercy. Thinking that they might kill me in fear that I had a gun, I turned my pockets wrongside out and made motions to indicate that I was unarmed.

They laughed all the more. One of them pointed to the river, to me. While I watched them helplessly, wondering what they were going to do next, one of them started down from the hilltop; the others followed single file until all of them reached the river bank. I held my breath.

They did not come near me; instead, one by one they waded out into the stream, deftly picking their way, holding hands until they formed a human dam all the way across. Then one who seemed to be the leader hallooed to me, beckoning.

Suddenly I realized that they were not foes, but friends. They were offering me the aid of their superior skill in combating a river current. "Come on," they were saying in their own language. "If you fall, you'll float down with the current and we, below, will catch you."

I took the challenge, and managed by wading and swimming to get across.

When at last I climbed to the bank on the other side, I heard them laugh; then, before I could offer them thanks or any reward, they had faded away into the darkness.

Paul W. Mack.

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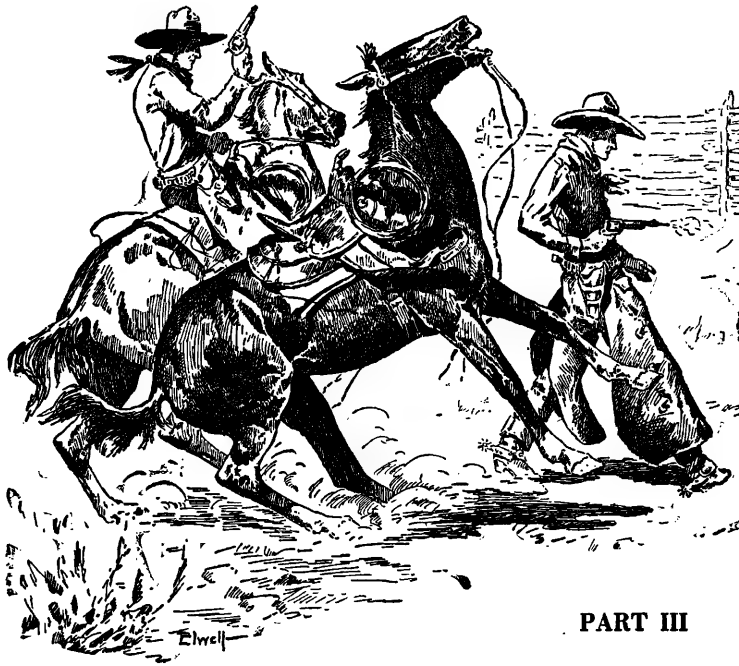


PART III

RED CLARK ON THE BORDER

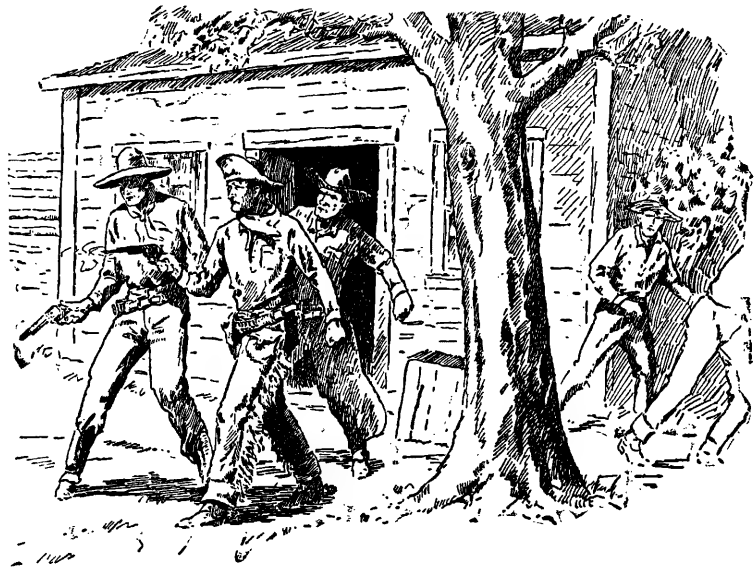
By GORDON YOUNG

Author of Many Stories of That Fighting Hellion, Red Clark

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

RED CLARK—you know, Red Clark of Tulluco—heard that Juilos County was "bad, plumb bad," so came to nose around, get himself a job. His first encounter in La Rez, county-seat, was with Zee Hill, journeyman printer, whose great desire was to get out a paper which would really tell the truth about some of the high-handed doings of various citizens of those parts.

Red, who was mighty quick on the trigger, heralded his appearance in town by telling Jim Suack, boss of Juilos County, that he was a horse thief and that night got shot at through the window of his hotel room. His comment on this occurrence was, "Feller, I bet I been missed before now by better shots than you!" Red also encountered "Colonel" Dick, news-



Red Clark—He's a Good Boy Not to Have Trouble With; the Only Way to Draw Against Red Is in the Dark from Behind a Tree

paper owner, Sam Suack, brother of Jim —whose appearance would never be the same afterwards—Alice Toynton, daughter of Bill Toynton, rancher, and a gambler, Matt Boland, whom he distrusts most of all.

It seemed to Red that he made enemies far too speedily, for he got many warnings to ride on. But he accepted a job with the Toyntons, offered by Alice, and found his first duty was to ride home with her to break the news that her brother Will had been shot in La Rez. He was interested in the Toyntons, but sensed the whole family walked in fear of the Suacks—and also learned to his amazement that Alice was going to marry Colonel Dick, although, still more amazingly, she seemed to be in love with Boland, the gambler. But his job there was not confirmed, so Red rode on to join the Hendersons, small ranch owners, who had defied the Suacks. Soon afterwards the Hendersons are murdered and Red, in a flaming fury, hastened to rouse the county to track the murderers. Again the trail lead to the Suacks, and Red rode on, accompanied only by Dugan, foreman of the Toynton spread.

Chapter X

GLAINE AND CURLEY

SUACK'S ranchhouse was a long swayback building, badly built years before by a rancher that had got out of the country. It had been added to, repaired roughly, propped up by Jim Suack who took no pride at all in the look of his place.

Men came and went, camped out in the hills until needed, or strayed afar, held up a stage or a bank, rustled a little on their own hook, blew the money and came back to be near the Border, and ready for any work that the Suacks offered.

Peace officers did not come nosing down into that rough country very often, because it happened that they had a way of falling out of their saddles for no reason that anybody could speak of.

Jim Suack had worked up a pretty good business in "buying" longhorns in Mexico and pushing them north to cowmen; some of whom weren't perhaps dishonest in snapping up a chance to have bigger herds at about $4 a cow. Running cows from the north and across into Mexico was more dangerous, took caution and skill, but was worth the trouble. The big Mexican ranchers had lots of money, some owned silver mines; and they had lots of range, liked Yankee beef—on the hoof.

Suack had snapped up many brands, invented some. Anybody who gave the matter some study would have found, for instance, that it didn't take much skill to make an X Cross out of the Greenhorn's V Bar, or a Wagonwheel out of the Dot Circle; an 8 B out of Durham's J D.

Dugan thought that if he and Red rode hard they would get into Suack's about daybreak, or breakfast time. "But maybe those fellows'll be lightin' out, first thing, for the Border. So we'll ride like hell, go clear around and cut in south and come up back along the road from the Border. Have a chance to meet 'em. One thing is sure. They'll not ride out of Suack's any way but south. An' if they don't ride, they'll be there when we come at sun-up or noon!"

Sun-up found them on sweating horses, but headed north between the Border and Suack's ranch.

"Now," Dugan explained, "if they start coming our way and see us ahead they won't think we are somebody they don't want to meet."

"Pat, I can't help havin' a deep feelin' down in my bones that we orta took Sam out there at Dale's an' hung him ourselves."

"Matt Boland is not a bad fellow, Red. The Toyntons like him a lot."

"This is a time when I'd rather be wrong 'n right!"

"Somebody is just topping the ridge. Two of 'em! Maybe that's them. We'll keep jogging easy."

After a time Red said, "No luck. Just a couple of Mexicans."

The riders came together. The Mexicans were young fellows, not handsome, wore comical sombreros, short-tailed jackets, and one had a fancy stamped saddle.

They reined up, exchanged pleasant enough greetings, with dark glances roving to find something that would tell more about these dust-covered travellers on tired horses.

Red's Spanish rippled and the dark faces brightened, answering. Yes, Suack's ranch was about three miles ahead. Yes; there were many men there. Yes, Senor Jim was hospitable toward men who came up from Mexico. No, Senor Jim was not there, but the Senora was there.

"God go with you!" said the Mexican on the stamped saddle, graciously.

Both raised their hats, bowed in passing.

HALF a dozen men loafed in front of the small store the Suacks let a wooden legged old scoundrel keep under some cottonwoods, hand-planted years before, between the house and the corral. Peg Leg had tobacco, hard candy, cheap pipes, cards, jimcrack knicknacks.

The half-breed Crow, the deep-voiced Paine, the sly nervous stranger Harve, had got in about three o'clock. They had gone up to the house and called for Jim. His new wife, though not a timid woman, from behind a barred door had told them Jim was not at home. He had gone, she said, to La Rez.

Crow and Paine and Harve had huddled together down by the corral, passed the bottle, had little to say, did not feel sleepy.

They had eaten breakfast with the bunch, saddled up, loafed about, waiting.

The tall dark Glaine and the young good looking boy known as Curly, leaned against the hitch-rack before Peg Leg's little store, whittled some, threw in a little chaff now and then as the big girthed Tex told humorously of playing tag with certain sheriffs over in the state he was named after. Peg Leg had rested on his elbows at the counter, smoked.

Crow and Paine and Harve lounged against the cottonwood, mumbled together with irritable rise of tone now and then.

Tex threw in an aside to the tall dark Glaine, "They ac' like they'd all swallered something as don't set easy on their stomicks." That reminded the merry Tex of the time somebody or other at some place or another, when drunk, had choked himself to death on catfish bones. "—an' us goodhearted fellers as helped bury 'im found over two hundred dollars in his jeans!" Tex thought that was a good joke.

The lean lipped Glaine smiled a little, not much.

Another man or two came sauntering up. One picked his teeth with a goose quill that he kept by him in a vest pocket. The other had a slabsided face, and talked from one side of his mouth. There was a bullet's puckered scar on the other cheek. He inquired generally, "Wonder when Jim's comin' back? An' whar's Sam?"

"Thar's somebody comin' over down yonder." Tex pointed, pushed up his hat, shaded his eyes with a palm. "Don' 'pear to be greasers."

Crow and Paine and Harve got together, clumped to the hitch-rack, looked.

"From the Border," said the deep-voiced Paine, then turned squarely about, looked off northward.

"Get out that thingumajig an' le's have a look," the half-breed Crow suggested.

Paine stirred toward his saddle, but Harve half-whispered, "You damn fool, you!"

"What'd we care?" Paine growled. "They're comin' from the south, ain't they? Nobody's heard yet. An' we oughta try it out. See whether to sell it to Jim or to take it along for ourselves."

The other men loafing there watched, interested, as Paine drew from a saddle scabbard where there was no rifle, a telescope, pulled it to more than the length of a man's arm, lifted it, squinted, saw nothing, cussed a little. "Somepun wrong with the thing. Don't work."

"Let me try." Crow took it.

The scope was high-powered, therefore sensitive of focus; and in focus the magnification was too great for it to be held steady enough for clear vision without a rest.

"You must've busted it, somehow."—"Never done a thing."—"Don't work now."—"Let me try 'er."

Tex had a try, and the man with the goose quill tried, and the slab-faced man took a squint, then gave it over to the outstretched hand of the silent Glaine.

Glaine squatted down, rested the glass on the hitch rack, fiddled a little, squinted a long time, and pushed the tube in before he got up, gave it back to Paine.

"Busted, you think?"

"May be," said Glaine. He surreptitiously gave a pluck of forefinger and thumb at the sleeve of the boy Curly. They walked off toward the stable sheds; and out of hearing, Glaine spoke quietly, scarcely moving his lips:

"We'll just stick ourselves out of sight. If one of them riding in isn't Red Clark, I'd better get specs. He was off up over to Hendersons, and here he comes ridin' north—straight for where he knows he is not liked. The other fellow is another just about like 'im, or he wouldn't be along. I've got a feeling that Crow and Paine and that Harve have been off up toward Hendersons. They are mighty close-mouthed about where they were, so

maybe things didn't come out the ways they wanted—which is sure so, if one of them boys is Red! The Suacks surely do want his scalp. I think I'll start oilin' my rifle a little. You'd better make sure there is no rust liable to come on yours, too. Then I think we'll maybe head toward La Rez and see if any word has come yet from your dad."

SO RED and Pat Dugan rode into Suacks.

No man there knew Red by sight, and he wasn't readily recognized from any description because even the stitching on his boots was dust covered.

As they came up at a walk, Dugan murmuringly told which was the half-breed Crow and Paine. They readily guessed at the stranger Harve.

Crow and Paine and Peg Leg knew Pat Dugan, and wondered what he could be doing coming along from the Border. But since the Suacks and Toyntons did not have any trouble between them, Dugan was greeted with, "Well, 'f 'tain't Pat!"—"'Lo Pat!"—"What you adoin' comin' from down yonder? Been on the dodge, heh?"

Red's horse, at the walk, came up a half neck in the lead; came on, right up so close that only a kind of sullenness in not moving kept Harve from stepping back out of the way as Paine and Crow did.

Red threw away the reins as he came out of the saddle. He hit the ground saying, "You three skunks that rode down on Hendersons yesterday maybe wanted to meet me, too, so I've come!"

That was that, and told everything needful. Smoke rolled thick to the crack of guns.

Red shot over the holster with the gun's muzzle not more than half way past his skinny belly—the most hazardous of all ways to shoot a gun fast, for a little twitch of a nervous wrist would put a muzzle-blast and slug through a fellow's own hide. As it was, the two hundred and fifty grain lead bullet smacked into the catquick Harve's stomach just as his hammer fell and his bullet went right over the top of Red's hat.

Harve pitched forward with his head thrown back as if on a broken neck, sagged sidewise and did not reach the ground before the deep-voiced Paine, with curses in his throat, a gun in one hand and a hand tugging at another gun, knocked up dust behind Red's heels as he went down, smashed through the breast by Red's second shot.

The half-breed Crow, twice hit by Dugan, was shooting back, wildly fast. Red simply twisted his body, not moving wrist or gun, brought the muzzle into line by an upward tilt from a back bend of body. Dugan's gun and Red's made one sound. Crow, crouching on a wounded leg, went backward as if his heels were jerked from under him.

Guns had come out so fast, shot so quick, that the other men were caught slack-jawed in pop-eyed surprise. They didn't even know just what the fight was about; but Paine and Crow were friends, the stranger Harve one of the bunch.

Dugan and Red, in going up almost point-blank to Paine and Crow and Harve, had put their backs to Tex and the fellow with the goose quill in his mouth, and to the slab-faced pucker-cheeked man.

The sow-bellied Tex squawked, "What in hell!" and backed up a couple of staggering steps as his arm crooked gunward, came out with a full arm flourish, and went right on up skyward in a blind shot. Dugan and Red had not come in to get just three men; they had come to get all the Suacks in sight. Red's gun was out a little farther in front of him with forearm pressed to the hip as he pivoted on the sharp dime-pointed heel, spun about, let Tex have it where the mark was biggest—squarely in the belly.

The pucker-cheeked man, smarter or more cowardly, made a jump over behind Harve's saddled horse as he reached for

his gun's butt; but the fellow who had dropped his goose-quill didn't have that much forethought. He was mad and scared both, and he let go a couple of times in a way that was rapid, but he had his sights filed off and his luck wasn't good. Dugan leaded him up about the same instant that the fat Tex flopped his face into the dirt.

Dugan yapped, "Look out!" snapped his gun toward the head of the pucker-cheeked man who was putting his gun across the seat of Harve's saddle; but Dugan's gun was empty.

Red's gun was empty, too, only he knew it, had kept count — which was another part of the old sheriff's training. Red's left hand was pulling his second gun as he pinwheeled on a boot heel, faced the horse broadside. Pucker-cheek had been in gunfights before, knew what counted wasn't shooting first so much as being sure to hit first. If the Devil had been around handy to take a bet he would have bet his own soul that Red was a dead man. Red felt that way, too, and put a little extra quickness into the left-handed snap shot; but a man's head at ten long-legged paces isn't much to snap at from the hip. The bullet went low, smacked into the horse.

The horse jumped and the pucker-cheeked man's gun fell out of his hand; and when the plunging horse passed, the pucker-cheeked man was falling over backwards with arms flung out in a loose upward toss.

There was nobody else around except Peg Leg standing up on his good leg so high that his wooden stump was dangling three inches off the ground, and his arms were as rigidly high up as if he were hanging by his wrists.

"Don't shoot, boys! Don't shoot!"

Dugan, not pausing to reload his revolver, had jumped to his saddle, whipped out his rifle. He was bleeding a little from the left forearm but that was nothing to think about. He watchfully turned this way and that, ready to kick the gun butt up against his shoulder and let anybody that showed symptoms of not liking what had been done have some special attention.

Up at the house two women stood before the doorway where they had run out and stopped short. A Chinese cook and Mexican helper showed up around a corner; but the chink was a smart man and he went back with baggy trousers flapping and dangling pigtail flying out behind him.

Dugan said, "I reckon that's about all! You hurt, Red?"

Red had a funny look and, with a kind of caution as if wary, was stepping toward the out-sprawled body of the pucker-cheeked man. "Missed 'im, Pat; but somehow he died!"

DUGAN came over and they both bent down. The man lay on his back and the front of his shirt was red colored right up heart-high.

"God A'mighty, Pat, my shot was belly-low!" Red drew a breath. "'Sides, I hit that horse. Damn it, I know where my shots go, allus!"

He pointed across to where the horse had staggered and fallen; then Red bent down, heaved the pucker-cheeked man over, ripped the back of his shirt, found the little half dime-sized purplish bruise with broken red edges in the center where a rifle bullet had struck.

Red looked at Dugan, Dugan looked at Red, and both looked down toward the stable where a man hallooed. He was hold-

ing a rifle in the bend of his left elbow, fingers at the butt, and his right hand was high up, palm out. Close by and a step or two back was another man, not so tall, with one hand up just like his companion.

The women up at the house were calling and squawking to know what had happened, and who were the two strangers that had come walking their horses and wiped out a half dozen of Suack's best fighting men.

Peg Leg asked if he could go talk to the women and nobody paid any attention, so he took a limping step; nothing happened, then he took a couple more, cautiously. Nobody said anything to him, and Peg Leg pulled his hands down and ran with a stumping lurch.

Red was not in much of a friendly mood as he recognized the tall dark Glaine, the young Curly, not now smiling, who had sidled off so readily in the fight at Dale's Place. He looked Glaine over under a tight frown, much puzzled. This lanky straight-backed dark Glaine had the earmarks of a range-bred fighting man, yet he had submissively backed out of two fights, was again hands-up.

Red spoke, "How you figger, feller? Ain't these yore friends?"

Glaine took his time, eyed Dugan, eyed Red. "Would men like these be yours?"

"If I rode with 'em and et their grub, yes! Maybe I gotta say 'Thanks' for you chippin' in. I didn't hear the rifle crack, so was puzzled some. But me, I like even them that help to get out in the open doin' it!"

Curly bit his lips a little, and not to hide a smile, looked with nervous side glance at Glaine's dark wrinkled steady face.

Glaine said, "Red, I've made me some mistakes in my life, most likely. Maybe me and Curly here have had to look for a resting place where there wasn't much chance to pick and choose who et with you. I knew you were coming—" He pointed toward the telescope over on the open counter of Peg Leg's little store place. "I didn't know why you were coming; but I knew if you came I wasn't going to raise a hand against you!"

"Why not?"

"For one thing, I used to know a man named William Tyler Clark, Sheriff of Tulluco."

"Yeah?" Red didn't run around falling on the necks of people who said they had known his dad.

"For another," Glaine continued, easy-voiced, "did you by happenchance get a letter that had been dropped behind old Jack's bar up there at Juilos?"

Red cut loose. "An' you played hell, feller! I reckon maybe your intentions was good. I might have me some doubts, but I ain't suspicious now that you knocked over this feller here. It was that letter sayin' to look out for what was comin' at sundown that made us up there a little careless daytime, and——"

Red told it all, what he had found when returning from the hunt, what had happened, how they had run onto Sam at Dale's Place. He swung a hand at Dugan. "So me and him come—come right up so close we could muzzle-blast an' powder-burn 'em as they died!"

"I reckon," Glaine said, looking about, "Jim Suack'll know you paid him a visit! Where were you thinking of riding now?"

"Where we're most liable to find Jim Suack! You tell me where?"

"Jim somehow didn't take much of a shine to Curly and me. We felt bad, of course, that he ain't told us all his secrets. Don't know where he went, though I heard to La Rez. I hear tell he suspects the Governor has sent a man down here to nose around. Maybe he suspects you, uh?"

"Me? I'm just a puncher. I fight for any outfit I work for. I was workin' for the Hendersons!"

Glaine walked over and looked down at Harve; asked, "Know this one?"

"No. You?"

"He answered to a description. If he's the same man, there's quite a little chunk

of a reward on his head. He rode in here a couple of days ago with a letter from somebody."

"From who? Joe Dick?"

Glaine shook his head. "I don't know. But he had him a letter. Jim read it and shook hands. Are you sure, Red, that you and your friend here don't want some company when you ride off?"

"Plumb sure!"

"All right. 'Bye, boys. And luck! Our horses are saddled down here in the stable."

Glaine and Curley turned their backs, walked off, not hurrying.

Red frowned, watching. "Pat, he's got me up a stump. I purt-near don't like him a lot. Yet let me look 'em over when I'm hirin' men, and I'd purt-near take him quick. He must be all right, in a way. From the stable down there he could have picked you an' me off easy as apples, chin-high."

CHAPTER XI

JUDGE JACKSON

AMA TOTTILL-MENDEZ-SUACK, from behind the barred door, looked through the broken glass of a window and talked to Red and Pat Dugan who were on horseback.

Red had said as they rode up, "Don't let 'er know what we are after, or we won't get a chance to see if they is a box under Jim's bed. Just you coax that door open an' let me inside. Best way to make a woman do whatever you want is to make her think you don't want to!"

Ama was in a way a famous girl. Her father had been a no'count, easy going, hard-to-dislike sort of broken down gentleman. He married the daughter of a well-to-do Mexican merchant and drank himself to death.

Ama was born flirting, winked at the doctor before she was diapered, turned out not much good but kept on being pretty. It was like her now not to show her face at the window until she had fixed her hair with curlecue curls on the tawny cheeks, stuck in the high silver-studded tortoise shell comb, swung a shawl's fringe about her throat. She was a little thing, cute, pretty, and deceitful.

She had seen men die in street brawls and personal fights. That was part of the life of the country into which she had been born. She had stirred up jealous quarrels for little more than the excitement, wept sometimes, and sometimes shrugged her shoulders when somebody died because of her. The shooting had terrified her, and she thought Red and Dugan must be worse men than those whom they shot down. She hated all the men about the place, possibly excepting the young smiling Curly, and she especially hated Jim Suack—which was one reason, in a way, why she had married him; though Jim had given her a weighty pouch with which to buy finery in the Mexican town across the Border. As soon as she recognized Pat Dugan she felt better. She knew Pat and liked him.

Ama's dark eyes widened, hardened, as she heard the story of the Hendersons. She knew Hattie Henderson a little and, unconsciously bilingual, as she listened she called on saints in Spanish, rippled English curses with gasped breath.

Old Peg Leg leaned up against the house, listening too; and his indignation was tremendous. He blurted everything he could think of to make these two boys, who could surely out-shoot anybody he had ever seen, believe that he approved of what they had done. His insincerity caused him to bawl out:

"Why Jim he would shorely have shot 'em hisself when he found out how they——"

Ama's rapid fierce tongue screamed, "You dirty old liar— Jim sent them! He promised a thousand dollars. He's worse than any of them. Would have done all they did and more. I wish he had been here and been killed too!"

She poked her hand through the broken

window toward where the Chinese cook and Mexican boy, under Dugan's orders, were carrying, half dragging, the bodies over in the shade, putting them in a row.

The sullen-looking Indian woman in the room behind Ama began to talk.

Red cocked an ear. She was talking Spanish. He looked at Peg Leg. She was talking about Peg Leg and telling Ama that she was a fool to have said what she did when the peg-legged one could hear and would surely tell Jim Suack and Jim Suack would kill her.

Peg Leg understood Spanish, too; not as well as Red, and he did not know how well Red was overhearing what the women talked about.

Peg Leg said, "I'll just go along down thar an' he'p?" He ended the remark with a question, asking permission. Nobody said he could go or that he couldn't go, so he edged off with a swaying limp, backward look, then broke into a hobbling run.

Red was trying to listen and think of things. The thinking was in a hazy tangle; but the tangle was all around the clear enough notion that this woman, who was in a way pretty, surely must know a lot about lots of things, and if she could be badly scared would talk. He knew very well that he couldn't scare a woman, any kind of a woman, by making threats and scowling. He had tried it here and there from time to time and it didn't work. Women seemed to know that he just wouldn't hurt them, no matter how much they needed being hurt.

Dugan saw what Peg Leg was up to and started to take after him; but Red reined in closer, spoke low. "Let 'im go, Pat!" and winked hard with jerk of his head toward the window. He, himself, couldn't scare the women but he could let Peg Leg do it for him.

When Ama stopped quarreling with the servant and looked through the window she saw Peg Leg pulling a saddle horse to the hitch-rack and begin to climb from the rack into the saddle. She let out a scared squawk:

"Stop him! Kill him! He'll tell Jim! Shoot him!"

Ama began to swear in Spanish and English both, and the Indian woman droned, *"Quién se lo dijo á——"* and that made Ama mad, too.

Peg Leg could hear the squawking and he kept a frightened face over his shoulder as he rode off, hanging to the horn with both hands and bouncing up and down in the saddle with his wooden leg sticking away out from the horse's side and the stirrup flapping.

AMA felt that she could not talk well through the window. She always had her best success with men when she stood close to them. She threw off the bar of the door and swung it open, ran out with hands up, pleading. She was very mad and very frightened. Also she forgot that she was barefooted and had on a dirty old skirt. There was much of the slut in her. She liked finery but was lazy. It was easier to put powder on her face, perfume on her breast, than to take a bath.

She did her talking to Dugan, whom she knew, and patted his leg as she coaxed, beat the leg with a fist when the coaxing did not seem to do any good. Her moods were fluttery and intense; and she had been spoiled by learning before she toddled well that if she had tantrums and yelled and lied, and smiled and teased and lied, and kissed and cussed and lied, begged, wept, and kept on, twisting her tongue this way and that, sooner or later she could get just about what she wanted out of any man. Her skill that way had improved as she grew older; also her folly in reckless lying and deceit.

She didn't get Dugan to take out after Peg Leg and shoot him; so she began to beg him to tell her what would become of her now.

Peg Leg, she said, would tell Jim and

Jim would kill her. Dugan didn't say, "Serve you right!" He thought that maybe he ought to think it because he knew of her doings and her reputation; but she was young, and pretty even in bare feet and dirty old skirt; and he knew that Jim was likely to kill her.

Just as soon as he had heard the door-bar being taken down, Red got out of the saddle. As Ama came flying out, he went clattering in. The Indian woman sullenly got before him, asked gutterly sullen, "What do you want?"

"To give you a little present!" Red rammed a hand into a pocket, the hand came up with two silver dollars. "Just you an' me be friends for about a minute! Here!"

Her palm, with sullen composure, met his extended hand; then Red dropped to his knees, looked under the bed, flattened out, began to crawl. It was a dirt floor, dusty, thick with lint, cluttered with odds and ends of trifles from saddle bags to old clothes and empty bottles that had been kicked under the bed to be out of the way. Soon he crawled out backwards with much the squirming of a dog that backs from a deep gopher hole—with the gopher in his mouth.

The Indian woman stooped ready to snatch and fight if he had laid hold of some treasure that she didn't know about. He rose to his knees, opened the cigar box, let her finger and poke about in the letters. She was looking for money or jewels, asked, "Why you want these?"

"Oh paper is allus good to start a fire with when you're campin' out. I'm goin' to start me a fire that'll burn this whole damn country!"

The very first letter he looked at, the last one Jim had received, made Red rejoice. He read with difficulty and much muttering, and didn't know the meaning of at least one word:

Dear Jim:

I have just been favored with confidential information from an indubitable source that the Governor is sending a man secretly down here to worm his way into the confidence of you boys and I hasten to give warning to keep your eye peeled. Burn this as always.

Sincerely,

Dick.

HE WENT to his horse, stuffed letters down into the saddle bag.

Ama saw that he was stealing something and came at him. "What are you doing? What have you got?"

"Some letters somebody not as purty as you wrote Jim!" He was feeling elated and grinned.

His casual use of the word "pretty" encouraged her. She suspiciously made sure that they were merely letters, drew one from a discolored envelope, read enough not to be interested; then demanded, "Will you help me? Jim will kill me! Take me away! I haven't a friend in the world!"

Red buckled the saddle bag, slapped it. "Take you where?"

"I don't know! Somewhere where he can't find me! He'll kill me. He will!"

"I do kinda suspect that if he don't he'll make you wish he had."

Ama put a hand on Red's arm and squeezed a little, looked sweet and sad, and somehow made Red feel that she thought he was a fine handsome boy. If he had made a bet right then and there, he would have had sense enough to bet that it was all put-on and flubdub; and that she wasn't much good; but if all boys, and even grayed men, turned and ran from the women they knew weren't much good, most of the pretty, evil blandishing girls

of the world would either starve or have to take in washing.

Also he thought that if he could get her off where she would talk freely he might learn some things; whether, for instance, young Will Toynton had been paying her too much attention; tell why she had so soon married Jim Suack and hated him?

"Pat," he said, "it's purt-near murder to let Jim Suack get his hands on her."

Dugan, not so young as Red, was young too; her strong perfume was still in his nose. He had always thought she was pretty. "I know it. But where are we going?"

"To Juilos and raise some more hell!" Red slapped the saddle bag.

"Then she can come along if she wants?"

"Do you wanta come?" Red asked.

Ama lifted her dark face with a listening look, considering. Thoughts fluttered about in her head, cast hazy shadows in the jewel glaze of her eyes. She asked, "If Jim tried to hurt me, will you kill him?"

"He don't have to do that to get killed!"

"If I get to Matt Boland, he will help me!"

"That gambler?"

Ama nodded wih a perky look as if hopeful that Red might be a little jealous. "Ah," she said, "he is a fine man; don't you think?"

"I'll tell you better after we get back to Dale's Place!"

THEY had to wait until Ama dressed, then they started off for Dale's Place. She was on a side saddle because she did not think it lady-like to ride astride. She brought along a big brown valise with enough finery in it to have decked out a princess for a dance; and since she could not carry it, Dugan and Red took turns.

They were tired, their horses were tired. Ama chattered like a magpie until Red asked, "You an' Will Toynton was friends, some; wasn't you?"

"Some," she said, touching a curl on the side of her cheek with a gloved finger and looking at distant scenery.

"You feel awful bad when he died thataway?"

"Oh sure. Terrible."

"How it come your husband killed him?"

"I don't know anything about it!"

She rode up close to the side of Dugan and began to talk to him.

Red was carrying the valise, awkwardly. He couldn't set it on the horse's neck, and the weight pulled his arm. He was tempted to drop it, suddenly didn't like her at all; didn't think she was really pretty.

They rode up to Dale's Place. Potts bawled for Dale and Dale came trotting with head thrown forward as if he had to take quick steps to keep from falling forward. His eyes popped at Ama being with Red and Dugan. He pulled his hat, scraped and bowed, called her "Miz Suack," talked fast and welcomingly, but shifted his eyes about as if looking for a good hole to have handy to crawl into in case Jim Suack rode in. A hole would then be the most comfortable place for an innocent bystander.

Right off Red was put into a bad humor by hearing that Matt Boland and Sam Suack had stayed in the room the rest of the night, had breakfasted together, and Sam started off toward Juilos, Boland toward the Toynton ranch.

Dugan looked at Red. Their stares met. Neither said a word. Red nodded; Dugan nodded.

Red sat and smoked some cigarettes, then he went to Dugan. "All my fault. You wanted to do what orta been done. Soon as my horse is rested, I'm goin' to town. Though I don't aim to get in before night. How about you goin' back to the ranch; and if you catch that gambler, kill him!"

Potts had taken the horses to the stable to water and feed them. Red, cranky

about horse care, soon followed; and sure enough Potts had tied Daisy to the manger without taking off the saddle, not even loosening the cinch.

Potts was used to being talked to rough, but he got a cussing that left him gawky and a-blink with mouth open in a kind of admiration.

Red wound up with, "The only reason you didn't die as a baby was 'cause God A'mighty was too busy to foresee what you'd grow into! You ever tie a horse of mine without uncinchin' an' I'll fix up that oversight of his'n with a club!"

Red went back up to the house, found Dugan squatted before the front door.

"Red, Mr. Toynton ain't passed, goin' home. I'll go to the ranch an' even if that gambler ain't there, I'd better stay till they get a new foreman. Sorta help."

"'F he fires you, he won't be much of a man."

"Bill has changed a lot the last couple of years."

"Don't let that gambler talk you outa killin' him!"

"I won't." Dugan was dead tired and it showed in his eyes. "Red, I'm sure glad I met you. You are a powerful lot like Bud."

"If they was more women in this country like Hattie, they'd be better men! Take Alice Toynton. She's purty; but she likes that gambler!"

"I know."

"An' you Toyntons, you nursed that Mendez when you all knew he was a Mexican rustler; didn't you?"

Dugan nodded.

"I ain't goin' to say it served Bill Toynton right for to have him shoot his boy; but I am goin' to say that if you don't let snakes crawl around in your house, like you liked 'em, nobody in the fam'ly is liable to get bit."

Dugan drew a deep breath. "Yes, Bud he talked point-blank thataway to Bill Toynton about nursin' Mendez; and it hurt Bill's feelin's."

Red snorted contemptuously. "All them Toyntons has got a weak spot down inside of 'em."

WHILE they were talking the stage from the hills came along with jingle of harness, grind of wheels, smoke-like drift of dust. Potts yelled and yelled for Dale, and Dale did not come. Potts went looking for him, found him holding on to the back of a chair with his face about a foot from Ama's. He was smacking a dry mouth and making vague sounds of amazement.

He was hearing about the gunfight at Suack's; had never heard anything like it before.

A couple of miners, a hill town merchant, a mining camp saloon keeper, and the driver got out of the stage, went to the bar.

Dale was just bursting with news. The men edged to the door to take a look at Red and Dugan, then they went respectfully to talk to Ama. She liked having them come. The saloon man, named Lims was the most at ease with her. He had a big piece of glass in his necktie that he called a diamond. He might have bought it for a diamond. It glittered without having quicksilver on the back, and it would scratch a mirror. He was shaven, combined his black hair with vaseline, and that made him look like a gentleman. He suggested that she go on into town in the stage; more comfortable traveling.

Red and Dugan walked down to the stable, kept out of sight, watched the stage move off with fresh horses at a trot.

Dugan made ready to go to the Toynton ranch. Red told him, "Take that gambler's ears off him for watch charms. And remember, whatever he says as sounds right is liable to be a lie!"

Red bought some cheese, crackers, dried beef, a tin of oysters, can of tomatoes, saddled up, rode toward Juilos.

After a few miles he left the road, climbed toward a far clump of trees, rode

in behind them, picketed the horse, ate cheese, dried beef, crackers, drank tomato juice, oyster juice, and wished for coffee. He put the saddle in the shade, used it for a pillow, took off his boots, smoked a cigarette, slept, and awakened when the sun was far down in the west.

NIGHT came on and Red rode along, not hurrying.

His instincts were primitive enough for him to believe, or at least feel, that Bud and Hattie Henderson knew about the vengeance that had been taken; savagely primitive enough to feel that they rejoiced over there where lots of big fat cows roamed in knee-deep grass for any man to throw his rope on; put his brand on; and horses that never tired, cooks that never got drunk between paydays. His ideas of Heaven were too hazy for him to talk about to other people; but if it was a place where cowboys and their women wanted to be, then most surely it was good cow country.

It was along within an hour of midnight when he got to town, and being so late he didn't stop at the corral but 'loped on up town first to see if he could catch Mr. Jackson in the Eldorado, ask some questions, maybe learn a little something.

Lights were burning. The broken window had been boarded up. Before Red was out of the saddle he thought it looked like pretty good business for a dead town, late at night. The door was shut. He went in, pushed it to, said "Howdy" with the air of a man coming among friends.

Mr. Jackson was behind the bar. Charley, the barkeep, not working tonight, was on the other side with Pete Jones, the blacksmith, little Hopner of the New York Store in his big white hat that was pushed so far back on his head it seemed about to fall off. Red was most surprised to see that tall dark man Glaine whom he was always bumping into, and young Curly. Sue Max was there, and fat Dolly Varden, the tall blonde young Rose, all looking their best but not acting it. They seemed cold and tired as if being gay was too much hard work.

The mining camp saloon keeper, Lims, was there. He had talked much, spent money. He had his hat off as if wanting them to see how his hair looked, slick and black. Now and then he wiggled the diamond-like piece of glass with thumb and forefinger.

Up against the bar, as if it were going to be his sleeping place, was Zee Hill, editor, journeyman printer, frowsy, lazy, wearing the clothes of a bum, having the face of a gentleman, amused eyes.

Red said "Howdy," and the tall blonde Rose squealed. All had turned to look at him but no one spoke readily. Then the tall dark Glaine, with Curly tagging along, took his glass of whiskey to the nearest table, sat down, as if again getting out of the way. Zee Hill looked about at the faces with mild amusement. He flapped a pocket lightly, shook up the tobacco crumbs, straightened out a crumpled paper, twisted a cigarette with long inky fingers. "Pardon," he said and took the glowing cigar butt from Charley's mouth, got a light, put the cigar butt back without Charley seeming to know what had happened. The mining camp saloon keeper put on his hat as if he were thinking of leaving.

Red settled back on his heels, mystified. "You all look like a poison pup had bit you!" He was just as ready as anybody to be unfriendly.

Old Jackson rumbled slowly, "Howdy," paused, added, "son."

Sue Max, with spangles and dodads aglitter and rustling, moved up slowly and stared with black frozen-like eyes. Sue didn't look very young at all now. "Red, why—*why* did you ride in here?" She took hold of him as if she liked holding him, then gave a shove, pressed hard. "Go, Red! Get out! Quick! My God, go! Folks are saying terrible things!"

Red twisted away, pushed off her hands,

stepped by her. "Maybe, when I feel like it! Somebody start tellin' me why maybe I oughta feel like it!" He searched their faces with vague accusation; his glare settled on Glaine. "He been tellin' things about me?" Red's out-thrust arm made the accusation personal.

Heads swung on twisted necks, eyeing Glaine whose dark wrinkled face did not bat an eye. Curly seemed nervous enough, but Curly was just a kid. Only Mr. Jackson who couldn't twist his short neck, and seemed too bulky and hard-set to move his big body, did not look around.

Sue Max said, "No Red, *he* ain't!"

Lazy-mannered Zee Hill blew smoke out nose and opened mouth, spoke quietly. "Now that I'm reviewing and recollecting, Red, I'll say that he's about the only one here tonight as hasn't opened his mouth, except to let a little whiskey trickle down."

RED'S spurs jangled as he walked up close to Hill, and Sue Max came right along beside him. "Then you tell me why ever'body's gone crazy-like!"

Little Hopner of the New York Store eased his glass onto the bar, sidled off. The blacksmith saw what Hopner was doing, and followed. "Guess we'll be toddlin'," said Blacky, sort of low and hurried as if he didn't want to be heard. Lims, pulled down his hat, looked at his watch, exclaimed: "Late. Well, I'll be goin'. Night, ever'body!"

They were near the door when there was a snap-click, and Old Jack's deep voice came from about a foot lower in his belly than usual. "You boys are in too much rush!"

They looked over their shoulders and their eyes bugged out. They got their backs to the door in a quick submissive jump, so quick that Hopner's big white hat fell off. Old Jack had broken open his double-barreled ten guage, was slipping in buckshot shells.

"Come back here," said Mr. Jackson.

The mining camp saloon keeper got his breath, raised his chin. "Why, you can't boss folks around like this!"

Mr. Jackson said, "All right. You just open that door after I've said not to!"

"Be murder!" said Lims.

"Be murder," Mr. Jackson agreed.

They came back from the door, full of wonder. Hopner was scared; the saloon keeper acted mad, but not mad enough to open his mouth. There was lots of silence from all parties.

Old Jack laid the shotgun in the crook of his left arm, took up his corncob, prodded with stubby forefinger, struck a match, puff-puffed, lifted his eyes in a roving glance to make sure that everybody was behaving nicely. He jerked his head a little.

"Charley, you'd better come over around back here and put on your apron. All my life I've seen things go wrong because when there was so much talk nobody took the trouble to get right down to the facts as was knowed by them who done the talkin'. This here is goin' to be differ'nt. We're goin' to hold a sorta little court, like. I'll see as how order is kep'." He stepped back, pushed his high stool up close to the bar, took his seat. "This ain't what you call accordin' to Hoyle with all the proper rigermarole; but no lawyers bein' present, I reckon it'll be done honest!"

"My holy gosh, Mr. Jackson," Red blurted, "what's come over—?"

"Shut up, son. You'll have all the chanct you want to talk. Where's your horse?"

"Out front there."

Mr. Jackson puffed, meditated a little. "Sue, you and the girls go fetch blankets. Roust Whitey out, tell him to bring a hammer an' couple hands full of nails."

"But Jack—" Sue, being a woman, wanted to argue.

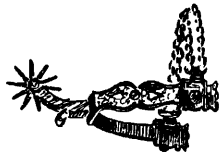
"Go on, honey. Do like I say."

The girls started slowly, then broke into a run, anxious to hurry back lest they miss something.

Mr. Jackson looked the men over, his bright pea-sized eyes settled on Hill. "You."

"Right, Judge. I know a little shorthand, if that is what Your Honor has in mind!"

Old Jack reflected, gazed into the newspaper man's amused eyes, decided, "No. We all got good ears and mem'ries.



Here—" He reached behind him, took from the shelf a big padlock, skittered it along the bar. "You go out and lock up. Then you take Red's horse, the which some people know, and lead him around back out of sight, just in case cur'us people might want to know what's goin' on. Tie him right up close to the back porch there. Then you come in the back way, lock the door and bring me the key."

The lazy-mannered Hill made a little gesture. "As bailiff of this honorable court, I am swollen with pride to obey!" He took the padlock and went.

Red looked after him, turned on Mr. Jackson. "What the hell do you think you are doin', Jack?"

"Quiet, son. Keep your shirt tail tucked in. An' you, bein' sudden-like with your guns, would it take much coaxin' for to get you to lay 'em down up here by me?"

Red's answer was instantaneous and blasphemous.

Mr. Jackson clucked reproachfully. "Tut, tut, tut! Then maybe if I ask for you to do it for *me*, would you?"

Red fidgetted, started to say no, wouldn't say yes, looked about, demanded, "What the hell's this all about?"

"You'll learn. An' if your conscience is easy, you won't mind doin' as I ask."

"But how about him, and him, and him?" Red pointed at Glaine, at Curly, at the man Lims.

The saloon keeper said quickly, "I'm not armed!" and lifted his coat tail away up to his waist. Pete Jones said, "Gosh but you are an absent-minded feller!" and he flung open Lims' coat, disclosed a shoulder holster, which was so uncommon in the country as not to be looked for. Pete explained as he whipped out the gun, laid it on the bar, "I seen it a while ago when Rosy wouldn't kiss him."

Old Jack's bright eyes stayed quite a while on the uncomfortable saloon man's face; then the rumbling voice announced with no more feeling than a tally-keeper at a branding chute, "Lie Number One, an' no argyment about it."

Red unbuckled his guns, brought them over, put them at Mr. Jackson's elbow; again pointed toward Glaine. "What about him?"

"Him?" Old Jack studied Glaine for a time. "He ain't been party to no talk at all an' so ain't liable to get excited."

Mr. Jackson drew one gun from Red's holster, then the other, examined them carefully, returned each to its holster, and scratched his short-beard cheek. He announced clearly, placidly, "Just for the information of all present, I hereby state that the boy's guns ain't got a notch on 'em."

The mining camp saloon keeper gave his glass lump a waggle. "But that don't prove he did't—"

Old Jack rumbled, "You'll have your chanct to talk, Lims. All I'm sayin' is the boy ain't notched his guns—the which is some differ'nt from the way most men hereabouts do."

PETE JONES, always acting a little funny and making remarks, held up his hand like a little boy in school. "Can I talk to the barkeep here?"

"You can buy a drink once in a while," Mr. Jackson ruled, "but not many. This court is goin' to stay sober."

The girls came behind Whitey. Hill followed, tossed the key to Old Jack, saw the bar bottle was out and not being watched, poured himself a drink.

Whitey, Pete Jones and the blacksmith nailed up blankets before the front windows, drawing them tight to keep the light from being seen.

Sue Max went over and stood by Red. She didn't say anything but people watched her because she was after a chance to speak furtively to him. Old Jack gestured and Sue went to a chair, flounced down, rolled a cigarette, had Hill give her a match, then she pulled him into a chair by her. Sue crossed her legs, rested her elbow on a knee, chin on her palm.

The blankets were nailed up. People stood about expectantly. Mr. Jackson knocked out his corncob, spoke:

"Red, you been over at Bud Henderson's and—"

Red started to talk, fast, angrily, but Mr. Jackson rapped hard.

"Now you answer like I say. You tell us how you come to work for Bud, and what happened, clear up to now."

Red was mad. His eyes had challenge in them. He told how he had gone to Toynton's ranch "—the night Will was killed here." He said that Mr. Toynton wasn't hiring so, "Pat Dugan said to ride over an' see Bud Henderson. I did. 'Twas like I'd met my brother!"

"Now you tell, Red, how did you and Hattie and Bud get on?"

"Like kids at a picnic and—"

"Did you by happenchance like Hattie first rate?"

"You're damned right I liked her, and when—"

Mr. Jackson raised a stubby hand. "Now let's go slow. Then what?"

"Yesterday mornin' I went huntin'. Hit a buck, tracked him to hell an' gone. Got him an' come back. Then—there—well, I found—" Red told it fiercely.

The tall blonde Rose began to cry and Dolly Vaden's pinkish fat face grew white. Sue Max bit on her knuckles and wrinkles came on her tense face like new scratches.

Pete Jones rested on both elbows with his back against the bar. His hat was away back on his head, his eyes were fixed on the back of Hopner's neck. Now and then Pete took a look at the saloon man Lims.

The dark wrinkled Glaine had his fingers lightly about the whiskey glass, not yet emptied. He watched Red and listened carefully.

"—rode into Toynton's to tell him, but he was gone. I went down to Pat Dugan. I don't know this damn country. I wanted a guide. Pat he come along. Over at Dale's Place we found Sam Suack drunk. We jumped 'im, and he had a locket—Bud's picture in it. We oughta've killed 'im, but—"

Red's words stumbled here. He partly didn't like to say he had been such a fool as to trust the gambler; and partly he didn't want word to get out that he was going to make some trouble for that gambler.

Sue Max, listening, clenched her hands till the nails cut, she was that anxious for Red to have his story smooth.

Old Jack brushed his forehead with a palm, in an aside to Charley said, "Beer."

"—but," Red went on, "you can't just shoot a man. We left Sam in the keepin' of Matt Boland. Then me an' Pat lit out for the Suacks. Rode clear around and come up from the south so as to head off any break for the Border." Red's arm went straight as a rifle barrel at Glaine. "He was there at Suack's when we rode in. Him an' that kid can tell what happened!"

Pete Jones got his breath first. "This is too much for my weak heart! Give me another whiskey, Charley!"

Charley broke into a sweat. "An' all evenin' him, knowing more 'n anybody, ain't said a word!"

Everybody was astounded; even Mr. Jackson's pea-sized eyes got as big as hazelnuts.

GLAINE arose, dark, tall, weather-wrinkled, and at ease. "Me and Curly, this boy here, had been working a little for Suack and we was there. By happenchance, down to the stable when this boy and another man rode in. They come in at a walk. They come up close to where the bunch was. They hit the ground and called for a fight right up close to the fellows' faces. When the smoke cleared away there were six dead Suacks. Me and Curly here walked out, heard why 'twas done, and approved. We got our horses and rode, straggled 'cross country and got in here a little after dark."

Glaine lifted his glass of whiskey, drank, sat down.

Lims, the saloon man, shouted, "Then they didn't line 'em up an' shoot 'em down, helpless like—"

Glaine arose, took his time, said, "You heard me tell that I approved, didn't you!" and sat down.

Hopner was in a chair, holding on with both hands. He looked unhappy. Now and then he lifted his nervous eyes, found somebody watching him, and he scrouged lower.

Old Jack's knuckles pounded down the hubbub of chatter and lifted voices. Quiet came. "Now, Mr. Lims, just you do all the talkin' you like!"

Lims took off his hat and rubbed his head, mussed his hair a little. He was nervous. He grinned at everybody but the grin wouldn't stay on his face; kept vanishing and an anxious look showed. Then he would grin some more. "Well, of course, I—I don't really *know* anything, only—you have heard—hm—" he looked at Red—"this fellow—"

"His name," Old Jack announced, "it is Mr. Clark. He is from Tulluco. Comes of a good fam'ly, too."

Zee Hill poked Sue in the ribs, leaned close. "I fear His Honor is showing a judicial prejudice."

Sue said, "Shut up!" then because she liked Hill she put out her hand without looking for him to hold. He held it, rubbed it, patted it.

Mr. Lims wiggled his piece of glass. "There at Dale's Place, Mrs. Suack—hm—she said that the Dugan and this—this Mister Clark—anyhow, she wanted to get away from them and come in the stage. We sat together and—hm—you understand, gentlemen, I am only repeating what—yes, *she* said that Dugan and this Mister Clark got the drop and lined the fellows up at the ranch and—I don't know a thing more than—than she told me!"

"You been mighty noisy all evenin'," said Mr. Jackson, "sayin' it was so anyhow! You been sayin' anybody was a fool to think two men could ride in on six an' shoot it out face to face an' not get killed! You been sayin' you believed them men was caught off guard an' plain murdered."

Lims almost wailed, "Well why didn't he he—" an accusing hand pointed at Glaine "—speak up an' say he seen it!"

Old Jack said, "They ain't no law, as I know of, agin a man holdin' his tongue!"

"An'," said Lims, "it did sorta fit in with how he—" Lims was now accusing little Hopner "—talked!"

Hopner scrouged down in his chair, bent his head as if from a falling club. Somebody gave him a drink of whiskey, somebody else pulled him to his feet, and Old Jack rumbled, "Now, Hop, you just repeat again what all hearsay you've heard!"

Hopner began in a low frightened voice. He said that Jim Suack, on his way back from La Rez, had been in his store when Sam came 'loping into town and, being told where Jim was, came to the New York Store.

"They was nobody there but me and Jim. Sam he come in all out of breath and looked sick. You all know how Jim is about his brother. Jim took hold of Sam and asked what was the matter and Sam begun to talk. Now, fellows, I d-don't know a thing only w-what—"

Old Jack rapped on the bar. "Don't go diversacoursin'!" Mr. Jackson looked a little pleased with himself for having used a big legal-sounding word. He took a sip of beer.

Hopner's unsteady weak-toned voice went on. "Sam he said him and the boys, Crow and Paine and that man Harve—he said they rode in on Henderson's—he said they wanted to talk with Bud—" Hopner grimaced as if a tooth hurt him. "I c-can't talk no more. I—I feel sick!"

MR. JACKSON cleared his throat, lay forward on the bar, demanded in a deep belly-rumble, "And how you reckon all us that liked this here boy have been feelin' all night with your talk, and his'n there?" His bright eyes shifted to Lims.

But Hopner said he couldn't talk any more and flopped down in the chair, doubled over and made sick sounds.

Red said, "What on earth is the matter with ever'body? What you talkin' about anyhow?"

Sue Max jumped up. She screamed, I'll tell you, Red! Sam Suack said when they rode into Henderson's they found Bud dead, Hattie like you said, and you gone!"

Red stood there listening after Sue had said it and everybody was looking at him. He was not even mad; just dazed and hurt.

"Lims here," Mr. Jackson said, "he has been tellin' us all evenin' how that fitted in with you wipin' out the bunch over at Suacks. With them dead, you could accuse them."

Red did not seem to hear. His jaws locked tight and his limber-slim body tightened at the joints, rigidly. He stared at Mr. Jackson. "That's why you took my guns off me? So I'd have to be arrested on them Suacks' say-so!"

"Red, you ain't very smart. Here!" Old Jack gave the guns an impatient push. "I wanted all this talk threshed out by them as has been doin' the talkin'. I was afraid that, impulsive-like, you might shoot Lims and Hopner here. Not that anybody would much care! Them Suacks lit out for La Rez an' I hear tell they ca'culate to swear out some warrants and poster a reward. When Miz Suack come to town and heard talk about what Sam had said, she got back in the stage an' went on over to La Rez to find Jim."

"But what of Pat Dugan?"

"Lims and Hopner here they figger that you must've fooled Pat into thinkin' the Suacks done it, so that he chipped in an' helped you."

"What does Sam say then about me and Pat catchin' him?"

"We ain't heard that Sam said anything!" Mr. Jackson frowned at Hopner. Hopner would not look up. "So it 'pears, son, you are in a pickle. You ain't got no proofs right handy as to what did happen at Bud's place. You just got some friends. With the Suacks fixin' things up with the sheriff—well, here is your guns. Here is the key to the back door. The Border it is close by. Your horse is around back."

Zee Hill pinched Sue's cigarette out of her fingers, put it into his mouth, got up lazy-mannered, sagged on a hip, smiled a little. "Me, I think that is all wrong."

"We are listenin'. All us, Mr. Hill!" Old Jack did not look encouraging.

"If Red runs, people are pretty sure to say that he is guilty. And if he runs, he'll run where? No matter where he goes, or what name he takes, the story will follow. He can't ride far enough south of the Border not to have that story—"

Red was buckling on his guns. "Border? I'm not ridin' to any damn Border! I'm goin' to La Rez! An' if I catch them Suacks I'm goin' to bring 'em back. I'll bring Sam back on the end of my rope and he'll be talkin' loud, fast and truthful!"

Sue Max squealed ecstatically.

"My horse," Red said, "is purt-near dead on his legs, so I'd like to borrow—"

Pete Jones spoke up. "Kid, you go down to the stable and tell Slim to give you your pick."

Red said, "Thanks," vaguely. He snatched up the back door key and went at a running clatter of heels and spurs. He bumped against a table in the rear in the dark, found the door, fumbled for the lock, opened it, passed through, slammed it hard behind him.

Mr. Jackson took out his big watch, drew a deep breath. "Purt near three o'clock. But we'll all just stay here a little longer for to give that boy a chance to get going. Somebody might think of some business over at La Rez and send word."

Many eyes turned on the miserable Hopner, some on the inscrutable Glaine. He was a hard one to figure. It didn't seem humanly natural for a man to keep his mouth so tightly shut. They wanted to ask him why he had done it, but he did not appear to be the sort of man who would be polite if asked questions.

CHAPTER XII

RED WONDERS IF HE WAS OVER HASTY

RED started at a lope for the stable, remembered the letters.

He felt that they were worth more to him than treasure and it was a foolish thing to be carrying treasure around in a saddle bag.

He was just about under the cottonwood before the New York Store, jerked up the horse's head, then rode a few steps nearer the long hitch-rack, deeper in the shade of the bright starry night. He jumped off, pulled out the ten or fifteen letters, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, spread it on the ground, put in the letters and tied the four corners together, making a small bag.

The New York Store was set about two feet above the ground. A couple of steps led to the porch before the door. Red went to the end of the porch, stooped down, reached far in under, poked the small bundle out of sight, scraped up trash and loose dirt over it.

He backed out, got up, slapped his hands against his knees, knocking off the dust, then crouched forward, keeping quiet. He heard the clatter of hoofs.

A man on a leg-weary horse came round a corner down the street. He was lashing the weary horse; rode on by and stopped up the street a piece. The man got off and did not look to the left or right, but went indoors.

Red unbuckled his spurs, hung them on the saddle horn and started down the street. He edged up close to the door, looked, listened. It was a wooden door next to the dingy restaurant. Red stepped back a little, looked up. There was a light at the upstairs window. The door was unlocked, opened on to stairs. He stepped in and the door closed behind him making everything dead black.

He held his breath and stepped softly. Little squeaks under foot almost made him jump. He felt his way up an inch at a time with every nerve and muscle tense to go quietly.

At the top of the stairs was a small landing. Under the door was dim glow, as if the light came from another room, barely reached to this door.

He took a firm hold on the knob, moved it slowly. To his ears the slight metallic rasp seemed loud enough to make echoes and his heart skipped a beat when the lock clicked in release.

He inched the door open, and looked through. In the room beyond, a lamp with a china shade was on a table and threw a path of light through the doorway. Red

edged well over out of the light, moved forward, paused to listen. There were muffled, slight, indistinct movements, now and then a step.

He balanced himself on his toes, went slowly. The room seemed a half mile wide, was probably sixteen feet. He could, he thought, hear his own heart beat.

He got to the side of the lighted doorway, stooped low, peered. A front window was halfway up, and a breeze stirred the fringe of the cloth on the table.

The man's back was turned. Red stood up, stepped full in the door, stood there, made no noise, so his presence must have been sensed for the man twisted his head about, dropped the coat he was brushing, whirled with a pale hand going toward the ivory handled revolver high up on his belt; but the hand was jerked away as if the gun butt were too hot to touch.

"I'm listenin', gambler! Speak your piece!"

Boland's wax-like impassive face could for a moment show something like emotion. The look went away quicker than a little ripple in a still pool. "Why, Red, you gave me a scare!" The voice was smooth, cool, a smile even fringed the mouth's corners. His look searched Red's face, saw tense muscles, hot blue eyes, and the same set to the thin jaws that people always noticed wherever Red had to pick himself up off the ground and climb a bad horse again.

"Where's Sam?"

"In hell, I hope—and will be if ever I catch sight of him!"

"Most likely you will—in hell."

"You don't think that I let him get away? Why Red!" Boland moved a little nearer, half put out a hand with a stilted air of humbleness. It was just as if he had schooled himself to be so rigid and undemonstrative that he could not loosen up. "Sit down, Red; let me explain."

Red stood fast, not moving. "I hear good standing!"

Boland sat anyhow, laid an arm on the table, stroked his head with the other hand.

"We started for town here together from Dale's. Somehow Sam must have got to my saddle without my knowing. The cinch was loose. He simply galloped off and left me. He had the better horse. Was the better rider. I didn't know what to do. I cinched up, turned around and rode to Toyntons. They are bringing the bodies into town, Red. I heard you killed those men down at Suacks. That is fine!"

"You're a liar!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You didn't think me an' Pat would come back alive!"

"But, Red," the gambler moved his hand, turning it over with just about the manner of showing the hole card, "I hoped that you would kill those devils!"

"Did you tell 'em at Toyntons that I done that crime at Hendersons?"

That lifted the gambler out of his chair. He arose slowly, as blank of face as a dead man. "What are you saying?"

"Truth!"

"Red!"

"Sam Suack never had brains enough to think up that by hisself!"

"Think up what?"

"What he told here in town. You done it!"

"What?"

"Told him what to say!"

"But the Suacks and me are not friends, Red."

"Maybe you wanted to be friends. And maybe you are, anyhow! Like that colonel is! You and him are thick as two burrs and he an' the Suacks are in cahoots."

"Have you gone mad?"

"Purt-near!"

"Haven't I always shown that I liked you?"

Red's tongue was out from between his teeth in an instant, going full tilt:

"You're a gambler; that means a cheat! A cheat's a liar, allus. So you're a liar

an' a smart un. You're playin' a deep game. Me, I ain't smart. You've nudged and edged and poked me on to kill that Joe Dick—"

"Everything has been truth, Red."

"Shut up!" Red was thinking on his feet, throwing out the thoughts as they popped up. "You want to marry that Toynton girl—"

"You mad man!"

"You walk stiff-shouldered and play like a gent'man to make them Toyntons think well of you. I bet you never saved Will Toynton from crooked gamblers, like you said. An' how'd them Suacks know we had a telescope up there unless you told 'em? You seen it. An' they must've come in over the hills, around back. An' I wouldn't put it past you yourself to puttin' Mendez up to kill the Toynton boy."

THE wax cracked on Boland's face. There was no play-acting about the way that hurt. He said, "Great God!" and had a look as if nearly choked. His glance skittered desperately from side to side and all about as if the sanest thing he could think was that he had been cornered by a mad man.

Red's tongue was still going. "There at Dale's you figgered me an' Pat, or me anyhow, would get killed, so you told Sam what to say to make it look like—"

"I swear to God, Red, no!"

"I don't care who you swear to. Maybe you ain't done ever'thing I 'magine. I ain't really accusin' you. I'm just expressin' my opinion of you. It don't much matter. I'm goin' to shoot you for what I know you've done! You put that story in Sam Suack's mouth an' you're goin' personal to tell the devil you an' him, an' Sam too, made one big mistake!"

Red's hand snapped back, a gun was out and over the holster, but Boland cried, "Red, in God's name!" and up went his hands. "Not—not in cold blood!"

"You got a knife, you got a gun, you got two hands!"

Boland was a gambler, cold as ice and as hard, but there was sweat on his pale faintly yellowish forehead. He took deep quick breaths and looked as if his backbone had wilted a little. He didn't glance at Red. The nearest he came to it was in the slant-wise stare he fixed for a moment on the gun's muzzle. He slowly brought his hands down and sat down, leaned his head against slim fingers, elbows on the table. He either had hopelessly reached the point where he did not care whether or not he was killed, or else with gambler cunning and judgment knew that Red just couldn't shoot a man that wasn't making a move in self defense.

Gambler-clever, he had guessed right. Red's gun slithered back, nose down, into the holster, and Red frowned, troubled.

"Not killin' Sam, like I ought've, there at Dale's brought on all this trouble. I oughta kill you, too. An' I'm goin' to!"

Boland stiffened slowly, his glance straight and level. "Red?" No answer except a tightened scowl. "I swear before God Almighty that I did not suggest to Sam Suack what—"

"You're a liar!"

Boland's hand fell on the table, jarred the light a little, then he nervously patted the table, thought deeply, looked up. His voice was calm, his eyes steady. "So be it! Go ahead, shoot me!"

It was Red's turn to fidget; then, "All right, get up and start goin' for your gun!"

Boland coolly said, "No," sat carefully quiet.

Red was really thinking out loud more than talking to Boland. "I gotta get outa town. I can't leave you and I won't take you. So they ain't nothin' for it but to shoot you. You just figger that—"

Boland stood up. "Listen, Red." He spoke earnestly in a low even voice that somehow did not sound entirely calm. "I am a gambler. Will die a gambler. I have been an honest gambler! Do you believe in God?" No answer. "Do you?" Red eyed

him wonderingly, made no reply. "Do you? Tell me!"

"I'm not that much of a damn fool. 'Course I do!"

"Very well. You are a brave honest gallant boy. You see, I have no hard feelings toward you, even now. Do you dare put it up to God Almighty?"

RED'S voice took on a troubled perplexity. "How you mean?"

"We will toss a coin. The man that calls the turn has the first shot. Could anything be fairer?" Boland put both hands into his pocket, straightened his shoulders. "Do you dare? Could anything be more fair? You call heads or tails, and I'll toss a dollar!"

Red hesitated, then. "All right, tails!"

Boland drew a dollar, but before he could toss it a voice right up close by in the dark of the next room said, "Take heads, Red! It's luckier!"

Red whipped about in a spinning turn, stepped back with a gun drawn and looked into the next room.

Zee Hill put himself out in the light that streaked through the doorway, smiled uneasily, had his hands shoulder high and flapped them, spoke quickly. "I heard voices up here—yours, an' come to—"

There was the click of the falling dollar on the carpet floor, not loud but loud enough for Red to hear. He looked aside and jumped as Matt Boland pulled the gun that was high on his belt and shot once, twice, three times. The little pearl-handled double-action gun could spit fire as fast as a man could wiggle a finger, but the yank of the hard-pull trigger made aiming bad and the third shot didn't count because it was fired a split tenth of a second after a long barreled .45 blasted a hole in the gambler's breast.

Matt Boland's waxy face seemed to open wide in full expression of tortured amazement. He sank down in a slow fall, caught himself a jerky moment on an elbow, then flattened out on the floor.

"Gosh," Red muttered, "maybe I was over hasty!"

Hill rubbed a sleeve up against his forehead. "I thought you were damnably slow!" And he added a long relieved, "Whew!"

"I mean maybe he didn't somehow put Sam up to that story! Why'd you say take heads thataway?"

Hill reached out with familiar impudence for the tobacco sack in Red's vest, fished a crumpled paper from his own pocket.

"Oh I don't know, only he seems to win at coin tossing, which ever you take."

"How'd you come to be up here?"

"Old Jack set up the drinks and let us out a while ago. I was on my way up to the print shop where Niblo let me have a pallet. I help him set type. That gives us both more time to drink. I heard voices —yours! Knew Boland lived up here. A newspaper man has to be nosey, so I took off my shoes."

He blew smoke through his nose and mouth, eyed the dollar that lay on the carpet where it had slipped through the gambler's hurried fingers as he let go of it to snatch his pearl handled gun. It lay head up.

Hill pointed. "See! Heads. You'd have won."

Hill stooped, picked up the dollar, tossed it in a spin to the table. The coin rang sound and clear, settled down, head up.

"There it is again, Red. I'll be damned!"

Hill picked up the dollar, turned it over. "What is all—?" He turned the dollar back and forth in his fingers. "Look here —head both sides. Has the ring of a perfectly good honest dollar, too!"

"And he told me solemn he'd never cheated in his life!"

"What's a lie to a cheat? Making his living at it, would he be likely to say that he did cheat? I'll bet he's got another dollar with tails on both sides."

"I don't care what he's got. This is enough."

"Let's go down and roust out Old Jack."

"No." Red blinked a little as if awakening. "I've got to be ridin'."

"To La Rez?"

"Yeah."

"You are a damn fool, Red."

"I ain't. When folks I don't like start lookin' for me, I'm the helpfullest man you ever seen!"

Red went out at a trot, skittered on the stairs, came stumbling to the bottom, and opened the street door, looked out into the cool grayish dawn.

SLIM the barn boss rolled out in his gray one-piece underwear, looked as skinny as a skinned rabbit, and almost fell on Red's neck, joyfully. "Hello, kid! I hear tell you an' Pat rode in on that bad bunch at Suack's an'—"

"You heard somethin' else, too, ain't you? That story Sam up and told about—"

Slim tossed back his head, patted Red's shoulder. "Supposin' a well known liar was to come and tell you he seen me beatin' a little kid to death, huh? Say!" Out came a sharp forefinger, poked Red in the ribs. "You know that Harve as was mixed up in the thing?"

"What about 'im?"

"That's what I'm tellin' you. Shut up an' listen. I'd washed an' was dobbin' axle grease on a mule's skinned knee over there in a stall when Harve rode in a few days ago about the time Matt Boland was ready to ride out. They 'peared acquainted an' sorta like they was expectin' to meet. I rared up an' took a look but they didn't see me, so I pulled my head down. Harve he said he'd got Boland's letter an' come. He laughed some an' asked the gambler if, like usual, he was makin' a fool outa some purty woman. I couldn't hear what the gambler said on account of you know how low he talks, an' calm-like. I did hear him mention Suack an' Bud Henderson's name—an' yourn. They rode out together an' I never give it no much of what you call a thought till last night when I couldn't sleep good for bein' sorta pleased by what you an' Pat done down to Suack's!"

"I'm gladder'n ever now that I just killed that gambler."

"You done w-what? Holy jumpin'—say, I'll be jiggerooed! Who you lookin' for next?"

"Sam Suack! Jim too!"

"They're over to La Rez."

"I know it. That's where I'm goin'. I want a horse. The best one here!"

"Best un? The best un 's Katy, Pete's miler. Pete keeps from havin' to work 'cause fool cowmen keep thinkin' they've got a horse at last can beat that long-legged grayhound with a hoss-face. 'Course, if you stick a gun under my nose an' say, 'Saddle 'er!' I can't he'p myself none; but Pete'll shore have a catfit, hop plumb up on the roof an' bite his own ears right off."

"Let 'im bite! Quick, I'm in a hurry."

RED rode out of Juilos as if he were not going to La Rez. He told Slim to help folks to think he had changed his mind. It was still so early in the morning not many people were astir.

With all day in which to get there, Red had plenty of time to ride wide of Juilos and get on the road. Twice that morning he left the road to avoid people. One was a freighter; the others were three or four men on horseback.

He came in sight of La Rez before noon, went back in the hills, unsaddled, staked out Katy, and slept.

He woke up late in the afternoon, smoked a few cigarettes, took up a couple of notches in his belt. Food meant a lot to Red when he could get it; when he couldn't, he didn't fret.

He went over and talked to Katy rubbed her silken nose, pressed his cheek against her warm soft lips, then looked all

about cautiously. He hadn't paid much attention to whether or not anybody who suspected him of the crime at Henderson's came upon him; but he didn't want any-

body to catch him in such foolishness as rubbing noses with a horse.

As soon as it was dark he rode down to La Rez, stopped at a little candle-lit Mexican hovel on the outskirts. Red went to the door on foot, his hat in one hand, reins in the other. Brown little flower-eyed kids poked their noses out from behind the bedraggled skirts of a fat woman.

"Senora, may I have water for this beautiful horse? As you can see, this is the racing mare of Senor Jones of Juilos, and it is not to be known, but I am giving her some roadwork in training for her next race."

The senora quite likely had some of the most gallant and chivalrous knights of Old Spain among her more remote ancestors, though she knew nothing of them; but—as Red very well knew—whether merely Indian, or richly Spanish blooded, she loved horses that won races, and could not be otherwise than gracious to polite strangers whom God sent to her door; so she came waddling out and led the way around back where there was a well with a bucket on a rope.

Red pulled up water while the kids cuddled Katy's legs, pressed their heads against her flanks and sang her praises. The senora and a boy of about twelve brought handsful of fresh grass.

When Katy merely splashed her nose playfully in the water, Red knew that she had had her fill. He drew fresh water, took a gourd dipper, drank.

He explained in rippling Spanish that it was ever so much best that the people of La Rez not know that the horse was being given roadwork; still, there were some things up town that needed to be done, and could Jose, the twelve years old, come along and do them?

The senora with smiles and headshakes drew back from the dollar he offered but, being pressed, as she knew she would be if this gringo had worthy manners, accepted.

Much *pinole* for small hungry mouths may be purchased with a dollar.

Red went over behind the blacksmith shop where it was dark, nobody was about, and he sat on the ground to await the return of the barefooted deer-legged boy that had galloped up town.

Red murmured to Katy, "If you don't win your next race, they'll be one Mexican fam'ly in La Rez as won't have a stitch to their backs. You hear me? And if I'm still in this country, they'll be one handsome cowboy in the same pickle!"

Katy pointed her ears inquisitively at him, flung up her head with a perky side-toss.

He looked at the horse. "It's plumb funny," Red mused, "how you women are all alike, whether you wear skirts or four-legged horsehide. Even girl-pups is different." He took up a stick and idly drew on the ground lines that he could not see in the darkness. He did not have the word equipment to put his feeling into thought, but he sensed the characteristic femininity that runs true to sex through humans and brutes. "Um-hm." He tossed the stick away, thinking of the most stubbornly untamable outlaw horses, the fiercest dogs. "But when they're bad, they're worse'n us men know how to be."

Jose, breathless, came running. He had asked questions, listened, looked, ranging through the town as a thoroughbred pointer noses among brush piles. He

dropped to his knees in the dirt before Red, scrouged up close, talked fast.

Senor Jim Suack and the Senor Sheriff Marcher, and the Senor Somebody-or-other, had gone that morning toward Juilos to find and hang that terrible monstrous ugly man Clark who had killed so many inoffensive harmless men and a woman. "May the good God quickly put him into hell!" said the small Joe.

"You bet," Red agreed, "if he's done anything like that!"

The Senor Sam Suack and the Senora Ama Suack were at the hotel. One was in the barroom; the other was upstairs where 'Nita, who was Jose's cousin and worked at the hotel, said the senora was sick.

The boy took the dollar Red gave him, hugged Katy, told her he was going to save it to bet on her next race, and went galloping home.

CHAPTER XIII

TOTING SAM ALONG

RED tied Katy in the deepest shadows he could find in the alley behind the hotel, slipped to the back of the barroom, looked in. Sam Suack was there, fingering whiskey at the bar. Other men were about, just a few, not acting very sociable toward the scar-faced Sam. Red peered and mused and the impulse to walk in, give Sam hell, and kill him; but it wouldn't be like Sam to reach for a gun.

"Well then," Red reflected, "I oughta have a horse out back here to drag him to and put 'im on. I'd like to take that woman, too. Tellin' we lined men up an' shot 'em! What makes people wanta be like that for?"

He went around the block to the street, looked up and down for horses; knew that if things came out all right he would be more than forgiven for having "borrored" a couple of horses; "and if they don't, stealin' a couple of horses will be what they call mighty minor!"

Six or seven saddled horses were ranged here and there at hitching racks on both sides of the street. There was scarcely anybody about. He didn't know, but most of the men with nothing to do were down at the depot, as usual, to watch the train come in, see who got off, who got on.

Red went up to a couple of horses, looked them over, looked up and down the street.

The horses were tied with ropes. He knotted the reins of one over its neck, slipped the ropes, coiled one, and had his hand on the horn ready to swing into the saddle when a voice drawled slow and steady:

"Sure you ain't makin' a little mistake, Red?"

Red turned, faced the tall dark Glaine who seemed to pop up always near when Red didn't expect him. Glaine did not have his hand anywhere near a gun.

"Yeah. I reckon, a little un. I come for them Suacks an' I gotta have a couple horses, extry!"

"Jim Suack ain't here. Then you mean to take the woman?"

"Why you reckon she lied about me an' Pat thataway?"

"Prob'ly," said the impassive Glaine, "because she figgered folks would think she was lyin' if she told the truth. She can't afford to have folks think she don't hate you. What do you mean to do with her?"

"I don't exactly know. Take her to Old Jack, I reckon. Let 'im get out his shotgun, hold another sorta court."

"You maybe don't know there is a posse down yonder for you?"

"'T won't be much of a posse if it's layin' around Juilos waitin' for me to come in."

Glaine came up a little closer. "Word's come that you shot that gambler."

"He shore needed shootin'!"

"But he isn't dead."

"He ain't? Then I'd better get me some bigger bullets!"

"Some kind of vermin are hard to kill, Red."

"You know 'im? I mean know he's a varmint?"

Glaine said, "Some, a lot. Now supposin', Red, I sort of throw in with you. Give you a little help. Will you promise me something?"

"What?"

"You wouldn't hurt the woman, I know. So promise me that if you run into any kind of a fight, you'll let Sam get away without taking a shot at him. And if you do get him to Juilos, you'll turn him over to Old Jack? Will you?"

"Why ought I not shoot 'im?"

"I know how you feel. But I am a little interested in keepin' him alive—for a few days."

"You got somethin' agin 'im?"

"In a way. I'd like to see him turned over to Old Jack for a time. If you promise, Red, I'll not only let you take our horses here, but I'll do a little something toward helping you get started."

"Why you doin' it?"

"Maybe," said Glaine with something like a smile, "because I like you. And I wouldn't be very liable to like you, would I, if I believed what some people are trying to say they believe, the which I don't believe they do."

The good looking boy Curly came from across the street. He looked at Red. Some wonder showed on Curly's face in the starlight, but he said "Howdy," to Red and grinned; then to Glaine, "There hasn't been a word come yet."

Glaine said, "Son, you just go along back to the depot and set tight. Something will. Red here is borrowin' our horses, saddles too, so we'll have to skirmish around for some more. He's come, like he said he would, for the Suacks."

Curly grinned. "Don't you worry, Red. Things'll come out." To Glaine, "All right. I'll go back and set there till I grow whiskers. I can't imagine what's happened to my Dad!"

CURLY went back the way he had come. Glaine walked around into the hotel's alley with Red, taking the horses.

"Now, Red, I'll get Sam out here for you and set him on a horse, all ready to go. You do like I tell you, and you won't have much trouble with that woman—if you don't let her kiss you."

"That ain't likely, feller!"

"Go up the back way to her room. It's on the left next to the front. You tell her Matt Boland ain't quite dead, and if she wants to see him alive to come a runnin'."

"What good'll that do?"

"Try it and see. Only look out she don't make love to you. Take Curly. He's going to grow into a mighty smart man. For one thing, he's got a smart sensible father, like you had. Down at the ranch, she picked Curly for to flirt with. When nobody was looking. He was with her when that Harve rode in. Matt Boland sent him down. She is up there now and don't know Boland has been shot because nobody has took the trouble to tell her. Me and Curly are about the only ones here that know she would much care. Tell 'er he ain't dead—"

"He oughta be, I hit him square in the breast!"

"His heart's no bigger'n a peanut and hard as rock. Easy missed."

"Gosh! How you know so much?"

"Knowing about that gambler, I've made my business. I hope he don't die. I want to hang him. And nobody ever hated you much more than he does."

"I suspicioned somethin' was the matter with him, all along."

"You killed his brother. A gambler just like him. There in Tulluco."

"Well then why the hell didn't he do somethin' about it instead of fussin' around pretendin' he was trying to be friendly?"

"He figgered it was safer. He's a sure-thing gambler! 'Twas him, Red, had Mendez kill that Toynton boy."

"How you know all that?"

"I told you knowing about that gambler was a part of my business. He tried to make a deal with Will to marry the Toynton girl by getting Joe Dick what he called out of the way. The boy said for him to go to hell; that it was better she married even a fellow like Dick. How I know? Will Toynton told me!" He gave Red a push. "Now get along!"

RED went up the back way by outside stairs and into the hall. It had a dusty smell mixed with bad coal oil. A Mexican girl was turning down the smoked bracketed lamp that would be left burning with a thread of light during the night to light late comers to their rooms.

Red asked her, just to show that he had business, where Senora Suack's room was, and the girl showed him.

He knocked two or three times before a weary voice said, "What do you want, Sam?"

"This ain't Sam. This is Red Clark. Matt Boland he has been bad hurt and a fellow said for me to come."

The door opened wide. Ama Suack was as touseled as if she had been in a fight with another woman, and hair had been pulled. She had been crying and the room was full of cigarette smoke.

"Matt?" Her eyes gleamed at Red but it was an impersonal sort of gleam, as if her bright stare were fixed on things far away. "W-was he shot?"

"Yes'm."

"Who done it?" she asked in such a tense, savage ready-to-pounce sort of way that Red felt that man Glaine was pretty smart; this woman did love that gambler. "Who done it, Red?" She caught hold of him, gave jerky shakes.

"Some cowboy."

"Gambling?"

"In a way I reckon. 'Pears like Matt had a silver dollar with heads on both sides an'—"

"Will he die? Do you think he will die? Where was he shot? Oh what will I do." She worked her hands together, clasping and unclasping them.

"I got a horse down there for you."

"Oh!" She gave Red a jerk that was more forceful than could be expected of a woman who wasn't big. It took him by surprise so that he was in the room before he knew he was going. She was saying, "Come in here while I dress," as she banged the door shut.

He said, "Good gosh, but I oughtn't to stay in—"

"Oh, who cares? I don't! Why should you? Oh Matt, Matt! Set down there."

He more or less stumbled backwards into a chair. "I won't be but a minute! Where is he now? Is Dr. Rand with him?" She asked questions fast and did not wait for answers. "It was sweet of you to come, Red." Ama was pawing among the clothes that were scattered about on the bed and chairs.

"Why you want to tell that lie about me?"

Ama straightened up, her face blankly innocent and mystified. "What do you mean, Red?" Honey couldn't have been sweeter, dripped more smoothly.

"Sayin' me an' Pat lined them men up at the ranch an' shot 'em!"

Instantly, "I never!" More emphatically, "Oh I never!" In hurt astonishment, "Why would I say a thing like that?" Now anger-toned, "Who says I said it? Red, who says I said that?"

Red twisted his hat brim, crossed his feet, uncrossed them. "That saloon man you set with in the stage from Dale's Place!"

"Oh the dirty liar! I never! You couldn't, simply couldn't believe I'd say a thing like that? What I maybe did say was that you killed them just as quick as if you did have them lined up against a fence and the old fool twisted—" She came at Red with a quick little rush of feet, bent toward him. Her face was fiercely distorted. "Do you know what they are saying of you? Sam and Jim and Joe Dick? Do you know that they are saying you——"

Red's head jerked in little hasty nods. He swallowed, wet his lips. He didn't want to hear that thing said again.

"What are you going to do about it?" Ama's face was near his, her voice questioned and taunted, too. She, not waiting, gave him his answer with tense working of lips. "You ought to kill them!"

"They don't believe I done it! An' you'd better hurry up. Matt is badly hurt."

Reminded, she swished away. The man she loved was dying, but she took the lamp from the table and set it on the varnished pine dresser before the looking glass.

That somehow made Red mad. He hated the gambler and he didn't like her, and he wouldn't put much of anything past either of them; but this primping when her lover was dying some eighteen miles away riled him down deep; and, just because he thought it would serve her right to be jolted, he blurted:

"You know, of course, he was fixin' to marry the Toynton girl?"

"Who?" She had no more interest than curiosity. "Joe Dick?" Her hands were in her black hair at the back of her head.

"Matt Boland was!"

Ama whirled as if whipped around by a top string. "That's a lie!"

Red shrugged a shoulder, fiddled with his hat brim, met her eyes. "I ain't goin' to argy."

"That's a lie, I tell you!" She was almost on top of him, ready to scratch. He stopped fiddling with the hat, drew his feet back under the chair, sat motionless, grinned a little. It was a nervous grin but to her amazed jealousy it must have seemed a little pitying. "Why do you look like that? Why do you say that?" She shook his shoulder. "Answer me!" She drew a full breath through an open mouth, "Oh that's a lie!"

"Why are you so plumb sure?"

"Why are you?"

"Why else did he have Will Toynton killed then?" Red snapped.

"That little fool was killed because he was snooping and meddling with people's business down here, and finding out things about Jim Suack and Mendez and writing letters; that's why?"

"An' you, I bet, made your husband think he was snoopin' and meddlin' with you?"

"I didn't know he would kill the boy! I didn't. Honest I didn't."

"Was the colonel in on it?"

"I don't know. Matt hated that colonel, too. He hasn't played fair with Matt about —well, something!"

"How it come," Red asked, "if you love that gambler, you go an' marry Jim Suack all of a sudden?"

Ama's laugh was a shriek. "If anything happened to Jim, then what?" Red, not a squeamish boy, wiped his forehead, felt shivery. Her fury-foolish tongue clattered on. "And *you* are the one Matt wanted to see dead more than anybody else in this country! Don't you know you killed his brother there in Tulluco? He would have done anything to get even. But don't ever tell I told you, Red?" She bent close to him, put a hand to his cheek.

There was a knock at the door. Ama turned with a start, and Red stood up, expecting anything. The door opened. Glaine's long arm pushed it wide; his hand held to the knob. His voice was low and clear: "I come to say you'd better be hurryin'!"

Glaine gave the door a push, swung it wide. He stepped to one side, waited.

They went out, passed him. Ama took hold of Red's arm, hung on as they hurried in the hall. She held to him as if she liked touching him.

SAM SUACK, with an empty holster on his hip, was in the saddle and his legs were tied under the horse's belly. The boy Curly held the reins, also held a revolver. Evidently whatever word Curly had been waiting for down at the depot had come.

When Sam saw Red he made blubbery sounds and tried to fall out of the saddle; then he doubled over and hunched down as if his backbone had snapped.

"Help 'er on," said Glaine to Curly and took the reins of Suack's horse. To Red, "I maybe ain't doin' right lettin' you do things thisaway. But I'm still old-fashioned, some, in my notions of how things oughta be done. I sort of figger you've got some rights to take him. Better put your rope on Sam's horse an' keep it taut or he'll let it slip off. Mind now, what you've promised. You turn Sam here over to Old Jack. He'll be kept a whole lot safer than if he's turned over to that red-nosed sheriff. An', kid, do you want to know what it is that gambler feels Joe Dick ain't played fair about?"

"Gosh A'mighty, how you know how she talked?"

"I got ears. I carry 'em around an' prop 'em up where I figger I'm most likely to hear things. It was Matt Boland got hold of Bill Toynton's secret, and him and Joe Dick sorta went into cahoots with it; but Joe Dick, one way and another, hasn't shared up like the gambler feels he ought."

"How you know all about everything, so much?"

"For one reason an' another the Toynton boy liked me. An' mind now, if you let that Ama woman kiss you——"

"You ain't talkin' good sense!"

"Well she's kissed Curly over there a few times, an' he ain't been the same since. Her lips are bad poison; but pleasant to take, I reckon!"

Red put his rope on Sam's horse, then cut the reins close up to the bit. "Now maybe he won't be in no sweat to get my rope off his horse."

As they rode off, Glaine took Curly by the arm, guided him into the saloon through the back door.

"Your dad he may be mad at the way I've played this hand; but a boy like Red has got him a right to do things sorta high-handed and crazy. He's honest! Be better for this country, all countries, I reckon, if honest men was a little crazier instead of settin' and waitin' for some pie-eyed red-nosed worthless sheriff to 'tend to things. But I reckon Law and Order will come to this country tomorrow about the time the freight gets in."

(*To be concluded in the next* SHORT STORIES)

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Joe Day Certainly Managed Things at Squirrel Lake

FULL OF THE MOON

By H. S. M. KEMP
Author of "All Square," "The Son of Fortune," etc.

NINE times in three years old Jeff Rawlins fired Joe Day; and each time that he fired him he took him back again. Joe Day was the old man's right-hand-bower at the post at Squirrel Lake. Joe made out the stock requisitions and arranged the organizing of the outposts. Joe made up the fur-tariff and saw to it that the old man sold the fur at the right price. But you couldn't tell old Jeff Rawlins that. Joe was a jug-headed galoot; a hare-brained hellion that had to be set on, hard. Give Joe his own way, and, b' Judas, a feller'd be broke in six months!

Joe was first fired for giving a freighter-canoe a coat of red paint instead of green. A small matter in itself; but great oaks from little acorns grow. Joe, by nature hot-headed, wanted to be told why a green canoe should slip through the water any easier than a red one. Old Jeff bawled an answer to that. Joe bawled back again. Soon a couple of lounging Indians came around the warehouse to see what the war was about. Old Jeff had the last word.

"Lemme tell you this; so long's I'm payin' the wages, I'll give the orders. And right now you ain't got no more home than a yaller dog. You're fired—high, wide and handsome!"

Joe Day, rangy, big-boned, rocked on his toes and clenched his fists. His face was brick-red, his eyes cold gray. For two pins he'd take old Jeff and tie him into knots. But instead, he went up to

the house on the hill, packed his warbag and his blankets and pushed over to the parson's. Old McDonald was a good egg. Joe guessed he'd stay with him for a few days, and then strike for town.

But Joe didn't see town. Early the next morning, Mary Rawlins came looking for him. Mary was the old man's daughter —eighteen, slim, pretty as a rose in bloom.

"You mustn't mind Dad," she told Joe. "He's loony — affected by the moon. Whenever the moon is full, he's a misery to himself and everybody else. Anyway, he says he'll give you another chance. So it's all right, eh?"

"He'll give me another chance, will he?" growled Joe. "Who does he think he is—the Angel Gabriel? Nothing doing. I'm through!"

"Is that definite?" The girl smiled archly. "You wouldn't stay if—if *I* asked you to?"

Joe started. He looked at Mary Rawlins in the open doorway. There was an intriguing smile on her lips; color in her cheeks.

"Well, now—" he grinned. "Put that way, it sounds different."

THE moon waxed and waned many times after that, and Joe's service with the Rawlins Fur Company averaged one dismissal to every third full moon. These times and on Mary's advice, he drifted off down the village for a day or so, then showed up as though nothing had happened. Old Jeff met him with the customary plaint, "Lemme tell you feller; I run this dump before you happened along, and b' Judas, I kin run her ag'in!" Or, "Lemme tell you somethin'; you're big and husky, but right now I kin trim you hands down——"

Joe swore through his teeth, but remembering Mary's smile, stayed on the job.

So, in the easy manner of the North, the days slipped by. Old Jeff grew more sour and Mary more sweet. The girl was twenty-one now; fresh, unspoiled. Joe dreaded the day when she would turn to civilization and the Great Outside. For she was going, definitely.

"You know, Joe," she told him one evening, "I'm getting to be a perfect Indian; as bushed as a jackrabbit. I can read and write, but what I should have is a year in town."

"A year!" groaned Joe. "Why not make it a lifetime?"

The girl laughed musically. "Mother had a lot of relatives whom I've never seen. They're always begging me to look them up. Anyway, what is a year?"

Joe groaned again. But groaning failed to produce results. Came the time when old Jeff Rawlins eased himself into a canoe manned by a couple of Indians, punched bedrolls into a lazyback for the girl, and hauled her in beside him. There were volumes of orders for Joe, handwaves and a cheery "good-by!" from the girl. And Joe Day found himself boss of Squirrel Lake Post—and alone.

It wasn't till then that Joe noticed how big the house on the hill really was. And, after he'd fired the Indian cook, how empty. Days, he found enough to do; but the evenings were long and flat. Somehow, however, he managed to pass the time till old Jeff came home in the fall. Jeff reported an extensive drunk, visiting with old friends, and a badly-dinged bank account.

"And Mary?" asked Joe. "How's she?"

The old man grunted. "Never seen a thing of her. Runnin' wild. You know the way gals are."

That winter, Joe spent most of his time on the road. With his six big huskies he tripped from Cormorant River west to Sleeping Lake, and from the Post to the edge of the Barrens. It was the only thing to do, he told himself. If he stayed home and listened to old Jeff drivelling about Mary, he'd soon be a candidate for the asylum. So he rolled up great stacks of fur, and old Jeff gave him back-handed praise.

"Lemme tell you, Joe; two more winters with me, and you'll be a trader yet. When I was a young feller, I never had no one show me the hang of things. Not like you, y' understand——"

Joe grunted, loaded his big toboggan, and struck out again.

But on his last trip over the honeycombed ice, Jeff had some real news for him. It was during their dinner that he spilled it.

"Got a letter from the kid," he announced. "Feller flew in here with a coupla prospectors and brought it along. She's gettin' married, this year."

Joe almost dropped knife and fork. "She's *what?*"

Old Jeff misread his emotion. "Yuh," he beamed. "Marryin' the moneyed class. Feller named Watts—Freddie Watts. His old man's president of a bank down East." Jeff beamed proudly. "Lemme tell you, Joe; that gal o' mine may be a bush Injun, but she's got class! And can she pick 'em? You tell me!"

Joe swallowed with difficulty. It was hard to believe. Mary—marrying somebody else! It didn't seem right, didn't seem logical. He had always taken it for granted that when the time came for her to marry, she'd marry Joe Day. True enough, he'd never asked her. But then one didn't ask if the sun would rise or the moon would set. So why ask Mary that?

"—and when open water comes and the mail-plane passes through, she's bringin' him in on a visit."

Joe blinked himself awake. "Coming in? Who's coming in?"

"Why, Mary, y'goof; and this feller Watts. She's goin' to show him off to the old man and see if he'll do."

"And how long'll they stay?"

"That's up to them."

FOR the next week or so, Joe chored around the post. He felt dead, and a little bit of a fool. Trouble was he'd taken too much for granted. So, as soon as the rivers and lakes cleared of ice, he loaded his engine-rigged canoe, hired an Indian bowsman and took to the fur-trails again. There were debts to be collected, trading-outfits to be brought home. And when this was finished, there were two canoe-loads of fur to be baled for shipment to Winnipeg. In the meantime, Joe promised himself that when the mail-plane arrived he wouldn't be on hand. He'd take a trip, get off some place and stay away till the visitors had left. But his schemes vanished into thin air. The plane arrived three days ahead of schedule and caught Joe on the spot.

He and the old man were having an after-supper smoke on the wide verandah when out of the south came the steady throb of five hundred horsepower. It rose on the breeze, fell again. Old Jeff recognized it at once.

"Plane!" he yelped. "C'mon down to the shore!" Then he changed his mind, bawled a volley of orders. "No; run up the flag. Take a look in the kitchen and see if the woman's got things in shape. Throw on a fire——" Old Jeff scuttled off, not waiting to see if his orders were obeyed.

They were not, for the simple reason that Joe sank lower in his chair and watched the approaching ship. His jaw was hard and his eyes bleak, but a sinking feeling gripped his heart. Mary was aboard that plane, coming home.

A few moments later the Fairchild roared overhead, banked behind the spruce and came down with a splashing of pontoons. A short turn, a blast of power, and she shoved up onto the sandy beach.

A man got out, then a girl. Joe, from his roost on the verandah, saw old Jeff rush forward and grab the girl in his arms. Followed much handshaking, in which the pilot joined; and the party headed for the house on the hill.

Joe wanted to run, to drop into a hole and pull it in after him. Instead, he ground his teeth, tried to still the beating

of his heart and moved down the verandah steps. They met, he and the girl.

"Joe!" squealed Mary Rawlins. "Joe Day—good old Joe!"

Joe had a blurry vision of blue eyes, glinting hair and smiling lips. As for what she wore, the girl might have been clad in sacking. He gulped; grinned.

"'Lo, Mary. Welcome home." Then, as though this was too brief, "You've been away quite a while."

But Mary had turned. "Freddie, come here. This is Joe Day—the man I'm always talking about."

Joe saw a chap of medium height and spare build. The suit Freddie Watts was wearing represented important money. It probably cost more than Joe Day made in a month. From the suit, Joe's glance travelled up. He saw a rather strong chin, a weak mouth and a pair of insolently cool eyes. Then he shoved out his hand and gave Freddie Watts a perfunctory shake.

"How do!"

Freddie Watts colored. He withdrew his fingers and favored Joe with a stare of arrogant appraisal.

"Oh, yes. Joe Day. Hired man around here, I believe."

It was Joe's turn to color. Not from the words, but the tone that was used. The girl saw his start and the narrowing of his eyes.

She broke in nervously.

"I've dreamed of this moment for months. Come on in. I want to see it all."

THE others followed her, but Joe stayed where he was. After a while he pushed down to the store and sat smoking a cigarette on the steps in front. Ten minutes he was there, then he heard running feet. Then Mary Rawlins came around the corner and to where he was sitting.

"Oh, here you are, Joe! We're out of butter. Let me have some for the house."

Joe fished the keys from his pocket and opened the door of the store. As the girl stepped inside, she pulled up short. She stood there, sniffing delicately.

"Tea, and tobacco, and leather packstraps—and what else? You know, Joe, there's nothing like the smell of a trading-post to make a person really homesick.. And to think I left all this!"

Joe looked at the girl curiously. He wanted to ask her why, then, she had. Wanted to tell her to forget the blandishments of Freddie Watts and take up life where she had left it off. But instead, "Yeah, it's nice, all right." he said. "Feller don't notice it, though, being around all the time." Then, facing her in the doorway, he asked her a blunt, sudden question. "This Freddie Watts or whatever his name may be—are you marrying an egg like him?"

The girl frowned sharply.

"Of course I am! And I don't like that word 'egg'."

"And I don't like Freddie Watts," was Joe's short answer. "Still, I guess as you love him it'll be all right with me." The girl colored hotly, and Joe pressed the question. "And you *do* love him, I suppose?"

"Well, I guess—— I mean, of course I do!"

"Then it's all right, and I'm sorry I horned in." Joe gave her another steady look, then turned towards the shelves. "Butter, wasn't it? Here you are—a couple of pounds."

During the next week or two Joe managed to dodge Mary Rawlins and the arro-

gant Freddie Watts. He had to take his meals with the rest of the family, but this attended to, he sought the shelter of the store. Here in the routine work and in the baling of the fur for town, he tried to banish Mary from his thoughts.

He succeeded poorly. By what he saw and by what he deduced, Mary was more under the spell of Freddie Watts' wealth than actually in love with the man. For his part, Watts was affectionate and boorish to the girl in turn. There were times when he would willingly have worked young Mister Watts over and taught him a lesson in civility. But he held his hand. Perhaps a few weeks contact with the man would open Mary's eyes.

Then one day Watts and the girl came down to the store while Joe was completing the baling of the fur. Mary picked up a wolfskin, placed it around her neck and asked Freddie Watts' opinion of how it would do for a stole. Freddie wrinkled his nose.

"Might be all right fixed up. That way —a little too doggy for me."

The girl laughed, snatched it off her own neck and flung it about Freddie. He ducked, knocked it from her hand.

"Hey, damn it; what are you doing?" he demanded. "Don't put that filthy thing on me!"

The girl colored, looked swiftly from Watts to Joe Day. Joe bent his head and went on with his work. Watts tried to make amends at last.

"Sorry and all that, y'know. But you go crazy at times." He scowled petulantly, barked an order at Joe. "Give me some cigarettes."

Joe looked up. "Did I hear you say please?" he drawled.

"And what's the matter with you?" Peeved and possibly feeling somewhat humiliated, Watts chose Joe as an outlet for his feelings. "What the hell's the matter with everybody around here? Thin-skinned, or looking for trouble?"

Joe straightened. "Nobody is thin-skinned," he told Freddie deliberately. "But down north, we don't swear at our women. As for trouble, we never look for it and never go around it. Now about those cigarettes—let's hear you ask for them again."

For a long second or two, the embarrassed Freddie Watts regarded Joe Day intently. Hot color stole up around his ears; he licked his lips and his eyes narrowed.

"Why, you damned big hill-billy——"

But that was as far as he got. Something seemed to explode in Joe's brain. His capable hands went out, grabbed Freddie Watts and propelled him to the door. There he spun him, lifted him, and placed a kick where it would do the most good.

Unfortunately, Jeff Rawlins came in as Freddie bounced out. Jeff scowled, glared from the sprawling Freddie to the dangerous Joe. Ignoring the wide-eyed girl in the background, old Jeff blew up.

"What in thunder," he asked, "is goin' on 'round here?"

Joe waited, giving Freddie his chance. And Freddie took it. Brushing the dirt from his clothing, he tried to shove past old Jeff.

"Lemme at that hill-billy and I'll murder him. I asked for some cigarettes——"

"You, eh?" Old Jeff glared at Joe. His jaws ground; and Joe read the signs.

"Go ahead!" remarked Joe. "'Lemme tell yuh—as long's I'm runnin' this dump—"

"I'll run 'er!" blared the old man. "No jughead's maulin' a son-in-law o' mine. You're canned."

"High, wide, and the sky's the limit!" chanted Joe savagely. "But you're a bit too late. Fact is, I'm on my way!"

He grabbed his hat from the counter, put it on and swung to the door. But there he paused to ask the old man a question.

"This is the twenty-third, ain't it?" The sneer on his lips tightened. "Sure! Another full of the moon!"

WITH his seventeen-foot canoe loaded and outboard engine whining on the stern, Joe turned south down the Squirrel River. Now, he told himself, he was definitely done with all that lay behind him. No more Jeff Rawlins, no more abuse. This time, Mary had not asked him to stay. Well, it was all to the good; coaxing wouldn't have helped. The fact was that Mary alone had kept him at the post for the past five years. And now that Mary was gone, now that Mary had fallen for the dollar-sign, Squirrel Lake was no place for Joe Day.

Up till this moment, Joe had no plans formed. He was heading south merely from force of habit. South meant town; a place where men were men and not a pack of sour-faced cranks. Town was where he could buy a grubstake and hit out again. But where should he hit? What should he do? Well, a season at trapping would do him no harm. He had done it before, and he could do it again. But first he would need a locality; and Joe thought the Muskeg Lakes as good a proposition as any. So he turned west in that direction and spent a couple of days sizing things up. After that, he retraced his steps and continued the interrupted journey down the Squirrel.

The day was hot. Steering the canoe in the stern, Joe had little to keep him company but his thoughts. Occasionally a flight of ducks flew before him, and once he saw a plane winging high overhead. But for the main part he had the going to himself until he reached the Poplar Portage. And here, at the far end, two men were camped. A tent was pitched a little piece back from the trail, and on the shore lay an upturned twenty-foot canoe and a partly-covered engine.

Two men came out of the tent to meet him. Both could have passed for prospectors, for they were dressed as such; but there was a cold unfriendliness about them that just didn't fit. One was big almost to the point of fatness; the other was thin, weasel-faced, mean. The fat man Joe thought he had met before.

Joe tried to break the ice. While he stood rolling a cigarette, he commented on the weather, the shortage of game, this thing and that. But his easy manner failed to click. The hard-faced couple mentioned something about a silver proposition on Marten Lake and the fact they'd made camp late the night before. At last, feeling a hostile atmosphere, Joe bade them so-long and pulled away.

But for the rest of that afternoon, he felt uneasy and perplexed. Joe was no lynx-eyed Indian, but his years in the North had taught him to rely on what he saw. And by what he had seen at the camp of the two whites, both were liars when there had been no reason to lie at all.

"They told me," muttered Joe, "that they pulled into camp late last night. Did, eh? By the marks in the sand, their canoe had been dragged in and out of the water a dozen times. And why should they do that? Then again, if they've only been there that little while, they've done 'emselves well. There was an empty salmon-can where I stood, a bully-beef tin off to one side, three sets of fish-guts on shore and a half-burned sausage-carton in the fire. And that for a couple of meals!" He gave a short grunt. "And why should men making camp at night—all-in and tired—bother to pitch a tent when the weather was fine? No, sir!" he argued emphatically. "They've been waiting there for at least three days. And what are they waiting for?"

ANOTHER thing that added to his uneasiness was the certainty that he and the fat man had met at some other time and place. When and where, however, he could not say; but something about the man conjured up an impression of evil-doing. He concentrated on the point, became angry with himself when he got nowhere; and finally dismissed the matter.

In all probability the two men were legitimate prospectors; and prospectors were notorious for playing 'em close to their chests. But of a sudden he was frowning again. Marten Lake, their stated objective, was ten days north. And why should they select a twenty-foot canoe in which to make the trip? The twenty-footer would weigh nearly three hundred pounds; and somehow Joe could not visualize either of the pair slugging such a weight over the many portages that intervened.

"A seventeen-foot cruiser's all I want to tote. And I'm not portaging to Marten Lake."

Travelling to the soft hum of the engine, Joe's memory kept reverting to the fat man. He *had* met him before. But where? He concentrated again, tried to think back. Gradually, like filings to a magnet, little details began to associate themselves. Joe had been in a hotel, some place. He was drinking. Drinking dry-ginger. In a hotel— Then, like a kaleidoscope, things fell into place. The fat man was Bull Hoskins, pointed out to Joe the previous summer as a gunman just out of the pen after doing seven years.

Joe's eyes narrowed. With all events connected, here was Bull Hoskins and another man waiting on the Poplar Portage and giving a lying reason for their waiting. Bull was a gunman, a hold-up artist. And it may have been mere coincidence, but Bull and his pal were waiting on the route that old Jeff Rawlins and his fur canoes would use.

For a moment Joe felt a thrill of vengeful satisfaction. Should his fears be proven, old Jeff was in line to get his ears pinned back. Joe himself should have been bringing the fur to town; but Joe was fired, and the old man would have to do that chore himself. Then Joe's satisfaction began to fade. There had been some talk back there at the post of Mary Rawlins and the boy-friend accompanying the fur. In fact, Joe had tried to thwart the scheme. But now, should the plan have held, a complication had entered the case. Joe didn't give two hoots what happened the heir to the Watts' fortunes, but he was concerned about the girl.

Suddenly, Joe choked his engine, swung in a circle and headed back again upstream. Joe had no reason to butt into Jeff Rawlins' affairs; but a man would be a pretty low heel to know of danger besetting old Jeff and the girl and refuse to give a warning.

A mile from the portage he silenced the engine and resorted to the paddle; and at the first bend this side of the portage-foot, he went ashore and dragged his canoe after him into the undergrowth. He was going back, all right, but he had no intention of letting Bull Hoskins know it.

Skirting the portage, he came to the Squirrel again; and Fate herself might have timed him. Old Jeff with his two loaded freighters was just pulling into the portage-head.

As well as old Jeff, Mary Rawlins, Freddie Watts and a couple of Indians were on hand. Old Jeff stepped out, glared at Joe, grunted.

"You ag'in? Thought you was on your way. At least, that's what you said."

"And I went," retorted Joe. "If I came back, it's just because I'm a fool." He shot the old man an abrupt question. "Got all your fur on board—the whole eleven thousand dollars' worth?"

"I have; yeah," answered Jeff Rawlins. "But you didn't come back to ask me that."

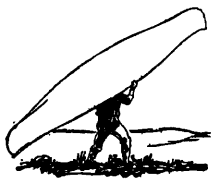
"No. The real reason was to put you wise to something. A couple of tough eggs are camped just across the portage. Bull Hoskins is the name of one of 'em, and the other's a rat-faced jasper that I'd hate to have trailing me up a dark alley. They told me they'd only made their camp the night before; but the truth is they've been sitting in that one spot for a good three days. Yeah; and I forgot to tell you. This Bull Hoskins is a gunman. He served seven years on a hold-up job."

OLD Jeff scowled. "What's all this to me?"

"Maybe nothing at all. At the same time, with eleven thousand dollars worth of fur and Mary along, I thought you might like to know it."

Old Jeff made no reply, but the information seemed to have its effect on him. Mary Rawlins looked from her father to Joe. Freddie Watts drew a cigarette from a gold case and tapped it on his thumbnail.

"Well," admitted old Jeff at last, "it's decent of you to put me wise. But there can't be nothin' to it. Can't be!" he repeated emphatically. "That stuff only goes in stories and the movies."



"You'll know tomorrow," was Joe's short answer. "If you get by, I've been dreaming. If you get a slug in the wishbone—well, my hunch wasn't so bad."

"And that's the rub of it." Old Jeff scowled in perplexity. "A feller can't tell." He spat in the sand, then turned to the nearest Indian. "Just got the one gun, ain't we? One gun amongst the bunch of us?"

"Mine makes two," broke in Joe. "But I ain't hankering to start a war. Somebody's apt to get hurt."

Suddenly, Jeff Rawlins took command of the situation. He turned to Freddie Watts and the girl.

"You two get goin'. Instead of follerin' the portage, take to the bush. If all goes well, we'll pick you up a piece downstream. If it don't go well, you're that much worry the less."

The girl lifted her chin. "You're all scared of a bogey-man. It's so fantastic. Nothing like this has happened before; so why should it happen now?"

The old man spun on her. "Lemme tell you somethin', gal; when I say——"

"Mary's right!" Freddie Watts crashed into the argument. "Merely because Day gets the wind up is no reason for a general stampede."

"Now you, eh?" Old Jeff glared at his prospective son-in-law. "What Joe done, he done for all of us. And Joe don't get the wind up easy. No," he growled. "I need the eleven thousand, and I ain't havin' nothin' happen to Mary. A man'd be a fool not to play 'em safe." He turned to the two Indians. "Start in!"

WHILE the natives packed the bales of fur across, Joe took a load of bedding, grub-box and old Jeff's outboard engine. He carried his rifle in his hand; but at the conclusion of the first trip there seemed little use for it. Bull Hoskins and his pal, both apparently unarmed, sauntered down to where the loads were being piled. They engaged old Jeff in haphazard conversation, and if Joe's reappearance awakened any interest in their minds they gave no indication of it. Several trips were made over the portage, and the sun was westering when the last bale and the canoes were carried across. Freddie Watts and the girl, tired by what must have seemed a useless wait in the fly-ridden bush, came up and joined the party. Neither Freddie nor the girl said anything to Joe, but the tolerant, amused smile that Freddie gave him said a lot more than words. It peeved Joe, made him grit his teeth. It was bad enough to appear a scaremonger; it was worse to have a fellow like Freddie Watts gloat over him.

"All right!" Old Jeff was giving an order. "Now load up."

Joe stooped to grab a bale, his rifle discarded, when the crashing bark of a .45 spun him around. Bull Hoskins and his rat-faced partner were covering the group. Each was holding a heavy revolver.

"Just a warnin'," grinned Bull menacingly. "Next time I'll lower my sights."

First and foremost, Joe was conscious of a certain satisfaction. He'd called the play to a nicety. The trouble was he had let down on his watchfulness. So now the five of them stood there with Bull Hoskins in command.

Bull, without turning his head, spoke to his partner.

"Go to it. I'll hold 'em."

The rat-faced man turned away, launched the twenty-footer, and struggled to fix the engine on the stern. It was a struggle, for Joe suddenly recognized the engine as a sixteen-horsepower job.

Twenty-foot canoe; sixteen-horse engine. With that outfit, they'd be sure of a quick and sure escape.

After that, and resuming his gun, Ratface walked over to the two Indians.

"Load up!" he ordered. "One bum move, and I'll make good Injuns outa the pair of you!"

Fuming, fretting at his inability to lift a hand, Joe saw bale after bale being stowed aboard. Near him old Jeff cursed the two with blistering savagery. Only Freddie Watts and the girl were motionless. The girl was pale-faced but resolute of chin.

At last the loading was completed. Ratface stepped aboard. Bull Hoskins began to back up. Twenty feet off to one side, Joe's gun stood against a small spruce. Apparently Bull had overlooked a bet, and Joe's nerves began to tingle. Then something happened that caused Joe to go dry-mouthed with horror.

Freddie Watts yanked an automatic from a shoulder holster and ran straight for where Bull was standing.

The girl screamed. Old Jeff bellowed hoarsely. Then Freddie Watts wheeled, covering with his automatic the group on shore.

For a moment Joe was stunned. Freddie stood there, eyes hard, lips tight. His automatic seemed to be drilling its way into Joe's middle. From the canoe Bull Hoskins gave a throaty laugh.

"Good work, Duke. Watch 'em till I get set!"

"I'll watch 'em! But make it fast."

THREATENED by the automatic, Joe stood there cursing himself for not seeing through Freddie Watts weeks before. This fur-theft was a well-planned job. So was Freddie's trip into the post at Squirrel Lake. So, too, was the return with the fur canoes. Freddie had been the inside man, the brains of the whole scheme. Then Freddie began to speak.

"No need for any trouble, folks. Just leave things to me."

Joe began to debate his chances on a surprise rush. He might dodge lead, might be able to grab Freddie by the legs and dump him. Chances were, though, that he'd be downed at the first move. Then from the canoe Bull Hoskins began to growl.

"All set. C'mon; let's go."

Freddie nodded; began to smile again. Then spoke another command:

"Mary. Come here."

The girl started, blinked; then her chin went more firm than ever.

"You're not," she asked, "speaking to me?"

"To you," grinned Freddie. "And I said come here."

But the girl remained motionless. Joe, from his position off to one side, could see the contempt and hatred in her face.

"Won't, eh?" smiled Freddie. "Then I'll have to come to you."

He advanced, gun threatening the rest of the group. Again Joe debated his chances in a rush, but decided that nothing could be gained by antagonizing the man just now. He saw Freddie Watts pause a foot or so in front of the girl; heard him speak, though the words were indistinguishable. But there was no missing Mary Rawlins' reply.

"Go—with you?" She gave a high-

pitched little laugh. "Just what do you think I am?"

Freddie Watts underwent a change. The smirk left his face. He colored, snarled.

"Listen!" he said, and Joe caught his words clearly. "It's your choice. Do you come with me, or do I plug Joe Day where he stands?"

The girl stiffened, turned to face Joe. Then she swung on Freddie Watts again. "You wouldn't do that," she told him. "You couldn't!"

The automatic swung. "Want to see?"

"No, *no!*" She caught him by the arm. "Can't you go now and leave us. You've the fur. What else do you want?"

Freddie looked at the girl for a brief moment, and Joe knew that in his way Freddie Watts really loved her.

"I want you!"

Old Jeff Rawlins gave way to a vitriolic outburst. Joe saw him lunge forward, saw the beads of sweat on his face. The girl grabbed him, pulled him back. "Dad, I'll handle this!"

The next moment she was facing Freddie Watts, chin up, eyes level.

"You say you 'want' me. Does that mean——you *care?*"

From Bull Hoskins came an impatient oath, a last warning that he was waiting no longer. Joe scarcely noticed it. His eyes were on the girl and Freddie Watts.

"Do I care?" Passion and heart-hunger were in Freddie's words. Joe went cold, turned his head as Mary almost threw herself into Freddie's arms.

Then there was a scream.

"Joe! *I've got him!*"

Jeff Rawlins yelled. Joe saw the girl and Freddie Watts—the girl's two hands locked about the gunman's wrist.

"Joe. Now!"

Joe lunged forward. The gun roared; again. Half sick with fear he threw himself on Freddie Watts. The three of them went down. But he caught Freddie's wrist, wrenched it, smashed a terrific blow on the man's jaw.

Bull Hoskins' sixteen-horse engine roared into life and the canoe went streaking away.

IT WAS the double-cross for Freddie Watts. One of the Indians grabbed a piece of rope, bound Freddie hand and foot. Joe raced for his rifle, pumped in a shell, dropped to his knee. The gun kicked against his shoulder and a spurt of water shot up a foot from Bull Hoskins' head. The canoe was now two hundred yards away and travelling fast. Joe fired again, three times in rapid succession. His third shot did something to Rat-face in the bow, for the man suddenly slumped forward, his hand trailing in the water. Joe's last shot caught the engine. The motor went dead and the canoe swung to the current. Bull Hoskins knew the game was up. He came to his feet, arms upraised in eloquent surrender.

"I'll get him!" Grimly swearing, Old Jeff was launching his own canoe. The engine was already on the stern and he beckoned to the Indian with the gun. "Joe ain't doin' it all. We'll do the rest, if it's only pickin' up the pieces."

Joe did not particularly want the job. He had another iron in the fire. Beyond the reviving Freddie Watts, Mary Rawlins was standing. Catching Joe's eyes on her she turned away towards the portage.

But Joe caught up to her; and when he

called her name she stopped and faced him.

"Nice work, kid," he told her. "That took a bit of nerve, doing what you did to Freddie. And speaking of Freddie, how d'you like him now?"

She bit her lip, flushed. Joe swore he had never seen her so delectable.

"Go on!" she flung at him. "Laugh at me!"

Joe began to chuckle. "I'm thinking of your old man, and the night he said you were marrying the moneyed class. 'Lemme tell you somethin': that kid o' mine may be a bush Injun, but she can sure pick 'em.' Yeah," jeered Joe, softly. "You're one swell picker, all right!"

There were tears in her eyes, tears of anger, of mortification.

"Oh, I hate you!" she flared. "You stand there, grinning at me——"

Joe seized her by the elbows, drew her towards him and kissed her full on the lips. "I'm not laughing now," he said. Then he let her go.

She stood facing him, more flushed than ever. She was touching her lips, where his lips had been. Then:

"Look here, Joe Day," she said hotly, "you may be big and powerful, but let me tell you something——"

Joe gave a groan of resignation.

"Always the same. Always a Rawlins trying to tell me something. Well, go ahead," he sighed. "Let's hear what it's all about."

THE BIGGEST GAME

And So the Major Was Presented—in Spite of Himself—With the Freedom of the Country

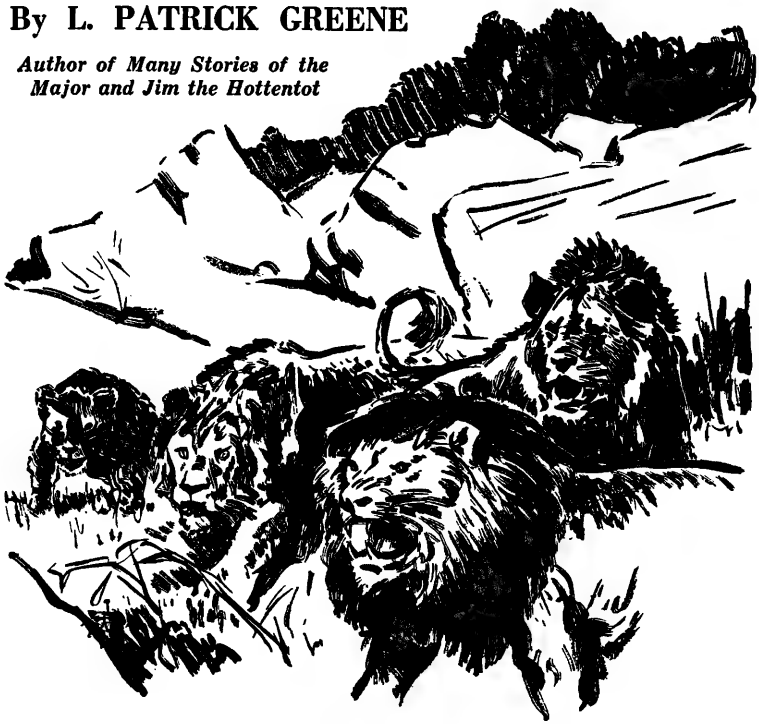
JUDGING from their facial expressions and the tone of their voices, four of the five men who sat in the ornately furnished private drawing room of a Jo'burg hotel were furiously angry; at any rate, they were consumed by an angry impatience, and they glared at the fifth man who lounged back easily in his chair apparently bored by his surroundings, his companions and the subject of their discussion. As he happened to be that subject, his lack of interest was doubly annoying to the others who shrugged their shoulders and exchanged meaning glances, acting like four well-meaning adults confronted by an obstinate and undisciplined child.

"Damn it!" one of the four exclaimed—he was a big, spade-bearded Afrikander and looked singularly uncomfortable in his tails and white tie. "If he won't—Almighty he won't! And there's an end to it."

"Right you are, Van Ness," the man on his right agreed. His name was Hays. He was a mining engineer by profession and one of the richest men in South Africa. "We can take a horse to water, but we can't make him drink."

By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of Many Stories of the Major and Jim the Hottentot



"You can't even take me to water," the fifth man drawled easily.

He rose and strolling over to the window looked down on the busy street scene below. He wore an immaculately cut dress suit and the monocle he wore in his right eye was not only an important accessory to his dress uniform—certainly it was as much a part of it as was the orchid he wore in the lapel of his coat—but it also gave to his round, clean-shaven face the look of imbecility which seemed to be his hall mark.

"Well—if you won't drink water, have a whiskey and soda?" Carter said with a good natured laugh. He was a slight, gray-haired man and held an important post in the Government administration of South Africa. He poured out a drink and took it to the man by the window.

"Bung-ho, old chaps!" that man said, raising his glass in a mocking salutation. "And now—" he looked at his wrist watch; it was a super affair and more fitting for a woman's wrist than a man's, "the hour grows late. Don't think me inhospitable. Rather not. I don't want to hurry you away, stay as long as you like —but me—" he yawned affectedly—"I'm off to bed. Toodle-oo."

"Just a minute, Major," Carter begged. "Won't nothing make you change your mind?"

"'Fraid not, old top. I'm obstinate at times—always was. Why when I was a child I remember—"

The four men groaned in lugubrious dismay.

The man Carter had called Major looked at them solicitously.

"What's the matter, dear lads? Have I dined you too well and—er—not wisely. Have you—er—tummy aches or something? Let me get you—"

"We have belly aches, yes," Jacob Steinberg, the fourth man, interrupted. "But it is not from food. No. It is the talk you give us. Oy! Such talk, Major. An' we do not vant to hear about when you was a child. You should have been strangled then, I think."

JACOB STEINBERG'S brown eyes twinkled behind the strong lensed glasses he wore, cancelling the sting of his words. "An' now, my poy, you listen to old Jacob. Here we are. Look now. There's Hays—he can make you a director of one his mines, or of all his mines. Oy!

"He cannot even begin to count his money; an' what's his is yours an' what's yours is your own. And men in the Government—here an' in England—listen to what Hays says. An' Carter—he is not very wealthy, no. That is his fault. He could be, but Carter is high minded. He works—watch him wriggle!—for an ideal. But he has power, oy, yes. Government men with money listen when Carter talks. Van Ness! You know all about Van Ness. He could be president of this country if he wished for it to have a president. He has power, Major, my poy, an' wealth. Last—but I ain't a *little* least, is old Jacob Steinberg. I've heard men call me names. Such names—me and Shylock, you would think, was brothers. But names to me are no never mind. I got my friends"—he smiled happily at the other men—"an' I've got money. Oy, yes. I'm no hypocrite. Money's got its uses. The more money the more uses. Vell, now. Here are us four an' there are you. Ain't there nothing we can give you?" He continued desperately as the other shook his head. "Listen. Maybe the things we've offered didn't interest you. But there's other things we didn't mention—only because we thought you'd laugh at us if we mentioned them."

"Such as?" the monocled man questioned. "It's my insatiable curiosity which prompts the question. I was always inquisitive. Why, as a child—"

"Ach sis!" Van Ness shouted. "There he goes again."

"If, Major," Carter said quietly, "you would like a knighthood, or even a peerage, it can be arranged and we will see to it that you have a sufficient income to carry the title."

"Pon my sacred aunt, I believe you're serious. Sir Aubrey St. John Major! Sounds bally grand, what? Look well, too, on a visiting card. Suppose I'd have to have a footnote, though, to explain that 'St. John' is pronounced 'Sinjun'. And that would spoil the balance of the card—if you know what I mean. But a peerage—you *did* say a peerage, Carter, didn't you?—that's most intriguing! Let me see. How would I style myself. Lord Robin of Hood? No, that reminds me too strongly of the name wished on to me by some sentimental journalist in the oh, so long ago. Lord Dop of Dorp? No. Strong drink was ever a mocker and *dop* is a truly vile concoction. Ah! I have it. Lord Blue of Clay. And my coat of arms—must have a coat of arms!—diamond rampant, I.D.B. (Honor Erased) lying on a field of gold. Or perhaps——"

"But seriously, Major," Hays interrupted indignantly.

"Oh, but I *am* being serious, really. This is a very important matter. The selecting of a coat of arms is no light task, I assure you. It must fit—an' be fitting, if you get the distinction."

"I, too, must ask you to be serious, Major," Carter said quietly. "Are we to take it that the levity in which you see fit to treat our proposals means that you refuse them?"

"You take it correctly, old man."

"Then vot *do* you want?" Jacob Steinberg exclaimed explosively.

"Have I asked for anything?"

"No—but, Major, every man has his price."

"Really? And you, gentlemen, what was your price?"

"We don't come into this, Major. We did nothing, but we got our reward, just the same. We have the knowledge that the danger of rebellion which threatened to sweep over the country has been removed—thanks to you."

"'Pon my soul, gentlemen," the Major exclaimed. "I don't know what to say to you. At the risk of sounding priggish I must ask this, Why should you suppose that I should desire any other reward than the one which satisfies you?"

"Yes, I know," Carter said uneasily. "But we feel—and when they know the facts, all the people in South Africa will support us—that you should be suitably rewarded."

"Thank you so much," the Major exclaimed sarcastically. "And I suppose it is also your idea that the—er—reward be made a public occasion; holidays for the schools, oxen roasted whole for the natives, speeches an'—er—all that rot?"

"Yes, of course," they assured him hastily.

"Well, really! Words fail me. Much as I regret cheating the children and natives —I still say 'No'!"

"But, Major—"

"*Ach sis,* man—"

"My poy—"

"You can't—"

THE Major checked their protests.

"*Ach sis,* there are no 'buts' about it, my poys," he said. "And I can. Can refuse, I mean. Why won't you leave a chappy alone? I don't want a reward an' I find all this talk damnably insulting and an infringement on the—er—liberty of the subject. My word, yes. I've got all the money I require for my needs. If I run short, I can always do a bit of honest —or not so honest—I.D.B.-ing. I'm satisfied with my own name and—er—title. I am *the* Major, you know. As for a coat of arms—" He turned solemnly around, arms akimbo, then asked anxiously, "What do you think of this coat? Don't think it is perhaps just a little bit on the tight side?" He laughed at their expressions, then continued, "Now, where was I. Oh, I know. I don't want a coat of arms. In fact all I want is to be left alone—and you don't seem to be disposed to grant me that."

"But damn it, Major," Hays said. "We are not alone in our desire to reward you. We are a deputation, a national deputation; how are we going to explain your refusal to—"

"So that's why you're so bally insistent," the Major interrupted coldly. "Well—that's your pigeon an' I don't care how you cook it. But leave me alone. Tomorrow I'm leaving this place with Jim. We're trekking—oh, I don't know where we'll go. That doesn't matter. The thing is, we're going somewhere. We'll go on a hunting trip, by jove, that's what. An' we're going to rough it, real he-man fashion. The hard ground for a bed and the star strewn sky for a roof—all that, you know. And by the time we return to the haunts of civilization I hope you'll all be in *trunk* or made peers an' forced to walk about in ermine robes with bally big crowns balanced on your heads!

"Good night and, if I may quote Jim, 'If I don't see you, s'long, hullo!'"

Before they could stop him he had left the room and, slamming the door noisily behind him he hurried down the corridor to his own suite. There he was greeted by

a Hottentot dressed in a white, semi-uniform which accentuated the length of his powerful, gorilla-like arms and the girth of his tremendous chest. In contrast to the whiteness of his shirt the skin of his wrinkled, scar-lined face seemed even yellower than was actually the case. His thick, pouting lips and squat, broad-based nose gave him an almost Simian appearance.

He looked up from his task—he was methodically cleaning a high-powered sporting rifle—and grinned a happy welcome as the Major entered.

"Au-a, Baas!" he exclaimed in the *clicking* dialect of his race. "This *dorp*—it is a big place and in it a man can not hear himself speak. *Tcht.* And there are more ways of finding death in this place than there are in the fever forests. Here men laugh—and they are not happy! Here men drink—and their drunken dreams are filled with remorse, not laughter. *Wo-we!* What curse is there on the yellow dirt for which naked men labor under the earth? It is a curse of tears and sadness. If any man but you were my Baas I would go my own way rather than stay in this place."

The Major laughed softly.

"Tomorrow we leave it, Jim."

"Au-a, Baas!" the Hottentot exclaimed happily. "And where do we go—away from the *dorps!"*

"Away from the *dorps,* Jim. We hunt for our food, trekking only when the pleasure takes us. We will go where the wind of fancy blows us—"

THE Major's abrupt departure had caused some little consternation and the four men whose offers he had contemptuously rejected looked at each other uneasily.

Carter broke the silence with a laugh.

"We were wrong," he said, "and we've acted like idiots. You can't offer a reward to a man like the Major; it's a wonder he didn't blow up entirely at our clumsy offers—which were really insults. After all, the welfare—present and future—of this country is as much his concern as ours and his interest in it is even less actuated by selfish motives than our own. Then why should he be rewarded for doing no more than any loyal South African would have done?"

"If they had the ability, and pluck," Hays amended. "But you're right, Carter. And I think we were chagrined at his refusal because we pictured ourselves in the rôles of Great Men handing out sugar sticks to a good little boy. The Major's refusal to play has rather taken the wind out of our bags of self-esteem."

"Allamopsticks!" Van Ness exclaimed somewhat irritably. "So much talk—so many words! I wish you men could the Taal talk, then you would have to say what you meant plainly instead of hiding the *spoor* of your thoughts with words which mean nothing."

"Oy, they mean a lot, Van," Jacob Steinberg said with a chuckle. "An' I agree with Hays and Carter. They say we were fools to think to offer rewards to the Major. They say we insulted him—an' they are right. Look! Us four here—we too did things to stop the trouble from breaking out all over Africa. But for us, maybe, the Major could not have done vot he did do. But do we vont rewards? Mebbe some day I vill be a Sir Jacob—my wife vould like that!—but that vill be because I vill give money to this an' that charity, or to some political party—not for what I've done in this business. An' so it is with Hays, an' Carter an' you. Not?"

"Almighty yes," Van Ness said slowly. "But the Major—he is different. He—"

"Very different," Carter said quickly.

Again they were silent for a little while, then Jacob Steinberg said with a chuckle:

"I vas thinking of the Major an' of a way to trick him into taking a little of the something we think he ought to have an' which he vill not, he says, take."

"How?" Carter asked eagerly.

"Vell," Steinberg hedged, "mebbe it

ain't exactly vot we'd like to do an' it's playin' a trick on the Major—"

"That shouldn't stop us, Jacob," Hays laughed. "The Major's spent a lifetime playing tricks on people. It's about time he got a little back. What's your plan?"

"Look," Steinberg said. "We four—we are in one way or the other men whose word goes in this country. Now the Major goes a-huntin'. He says he is goin' to rough it! We know how he will do that; with a real bed an' silk sheets an' he'll, maybe, dress for dinner every night. But that's all no never mind. So now, knowing the Major, I say he von't bother about huntin' licenses or anything like that. An' first thing you know he'll be breaking some law or other which was never framed to hamper a sport like what he is. An' vonce he has broken the law the police'll be on his trail an' they'll hound him until they catch him. So now, here's my plan; we vill give the Major the freedom of the country—him *an'* Jim. As far as they're concerned, there ain't no game reserves, there ain't no Royal Game. They're free to go where they like an' shoot what they like. It can be arranged, not?"

"Of course," Hays said enthusiastically.

"Almighty, Jacob," Van Ness added. "It is brains you have."

"But of course, yes. Nor that ain't all, neither. Time'll come when the Major he'll go to one of my stores for provisions. Mebbe he'll want to buy some cattle, or mules or horses. Mebbe he'll need native laborers— Vell, I can promise you he von't be allowed to pay for anything he gets from my people—an' he'll be always given the best."

"Same from my people," Van Ness promised.

Hays whistled.

"And I can add my bit," he said. "You heard the Major say he'd do a bit of illicit diamond buying if funds ran low? And we all know what'd happen to him if he was caught at that game. Well, we can see to it that he never gets caught. I'll see to it that he *can't* be an illicit diamond buyer even if he wants to be. He shall be a director of one of my companies —or of all of them—even if he doesn't know it. I'll take out a diamond buying license in his name, and a prospector's—"

"Do that if you like, man," Van Ness interrupted, "but we only have to warn the police to keep hands off the Major an' he'll never be arrested—"

And so they excitedly discussed the methods whereby they would present the Major—in spite of himself—with the freedom of the country.

"Yes. But vait a minute," Jacob Steinberg exclaimed suddenly. "Carter? You are nothin' sayin'. Vot do you think?"

"I think that you are quite wrong, gentlemen," Carter replied quietly.

The others looked at him questioningly.

"But why—why are we wrong?" Hays demanded.

"If you carry out your plans," Carter said, "you'll be depriving the Major of the chief joy of his life. He—"

And out of his greater knowledge and understanding of the Major, Carter earnestly advanced his objections to Steinberg's plan. But the others would not be convinced and, finally, he surrendered to them and promised to do everything in his power to further their campaign.

IN DUE course the plans which were hatched in the room of a Johannesburg hotel bore fruit in the shape of letters—official and otherwise—to the men whose co-operation was required if the scheme was to be a success. As a result, some of the agents in charge of the Steinberg kaffir stores wondered if their employer had suddenly taken leave of his senses but most—knowing the Major, personally or by repute—chuckled with delight on receiving their instructions, and sincerely hoped the Major would pay them a visit. The same was true of the police; as a matter of fact they had long since given up all hope of arresting the Major for

I.D.B. especially as, looking on him as Royal Game, they had reached an unwritten agreement that no attempt was to be made to trap him.

It is true that one or two ultra conscientious N.C.O.'s in charge of out-stations wrote to their superiors asking for instruction as to what would be their position if the "said Major" committed murder or some such crime in the district under their control. They were told in language that was forceful and sanguinary, "not to be adjectival fools," as under no condition, or complexity of conditions, could the Major be imagined as a murderer or constitutionally capable of any crime other than an evasion of Game or I.D.B. laws.

As for the natives, they received the orders which came to them through their chiefs and headmen of kraals with no little mirth. In their estimation those orders were yet another proof—as if proof were needed!—of the folly of their white overlords. They were *ordered*—and heavy penalties were threatened for disobedience!—to give gladly, of themselves or their possessions, whatever a certain white man desired of them. And that white man! *Ou*, they had many names for him! They knew him far better than did his own people! They called him "The Just One," "Deliverer," "Lion Heart." He had the courage of a wild buffalo, and its cunning. He had the strength of an elephant and the tenderness of a cooing dove. *Wo-we*, they knew him! The order to them was as needless as is the breath of a weak-lunged old man, puffing to fan a fire into a fiercer blaze, at a time when a strong gale is blowing. But the white man would not ask, he would not take; he would only *give*.

The Warden of the Transvaal Game Reserves gleefully passed on his instructions to his rangers. A brief notification was all that was necessary, save in the case of the Ranger whose post was in the heart of the Singwitsi Reserve. This Ranger—Austen by name—was a newcomer to the country and, besides, a kinsman of the Warden's.

In his letter to Austen the Warden described the Major—and Jim the Hottentot—in exact and minute detail copied from an old police circular published at a time when the Major was badly wanted for offenses against the diamond mining industry.

The descriptions ran:

"MAJOR, Aubrey St. John. Generally known as 'the Major.' Height, six foot two. Weight, two hundred and thirty pounds. Eyes, gray-blue. Hair, black, graying at temples, worn brushed straight back from forehead, no parting. Wears a monocle. Cultured, drawling voice. Always immaculately dressed. Speaks the Taal and many native dialects. Expert shot and horseman.

"JIM. The Major's servant and bodyguard. A Hottentot. Scarred and wrinkled face. Abnormally long arms. Legs slightly bowed. Speaks the Taal and many native dialects. *As far as is known* does not speak English or understand it. Uses a number of English expressions in a meaningless, parrot-like fashion. Often says, 'Golly, damme, yes-no,' and 'If I don't see you, s'long, hullo.' Impossible to undermine his loyalty to the Major. *Do not attempt to bribe!*"

SUPPLEMENTING the official description, the Warden wrote:

"You'll be damned lucky, old man, if the Major does come to your district. He's one of the best and his Hottentot, Jim, is a jewel beyond price.

"He, the Major, is a great leg-puller so don't be misled by his appearance. He isn't what he appears to be. He generally affects a silly ass expression and pretends to be quite incapable—physically and mentally. He isn't. So for goodness sake don't make a fool of yourself by jumping to wrong conclusions. He's a wizard, too, at disguising himself and he may present

himself to you as a back-veld Boer, or as a prospector down on his luck. If you're in doubt, keep your eyes open for a Hottentot. Jim can't disguise himself. The chances are, however, that the Major will be himself and is probably traveling with enough gear—in the way of tents, and water filters and so on—to outfit three 'specially conducted hunting expeditions' which demonstrate the art of roughing it to wealthy, would-be sportsmen.

"However, the Major does not belong to that class. You'll discover that he knows more about your district than you do yourself. You'll find that he's a better bush-man than the best of your native hunters. Sit at his feet, my boy, and imbibe wisdom.

"And if he does go mad and profane the sanctity of your district by slaughtering game—Royal and otherwise—there's nothing to stop you from attempting a little moral suasion. But don't go any further. He has a free hand. Don't forget that. That's an order!"

Then, after a few paragraphs of purely personal interest, the Warden concluded with a recapitulation of the Hands off the Major order.

THE last stage of that letter's journey to Ranger Austen in the heart of the Singwitsi Reserve was an eventful one, for Africa played a sequence of typically malicious jokes upon the native messenger.

It began when the messenger was attacked by a party of young warriors who had crossed over into the Reserve from Portuguese East African territory on a poaching expedition. They beat him until unconsciousness intervened to save him, for the moment, from further pain; then they tore open his waterproof mail bag and amused themselves by pretending to read the letters and home papers it contained. Presently, their whims as inconstant as those of the ape people, they departed, returning to their own country, taking with them the messenger's uniform, provisions and weapons—leaving him only a clasp knife, which hung from his neck on a piece of twisted cord, a torn mail bag and a litter of papers. They laughed as they noted vultures soaring overhead and told each other that by sunset the messenger's bones would be picked clean.

But consciousness returned to the messenger before the vultures dared to commence their feast and they flapped away on heavy, reluctant wings to perch in near-by trees when he sat up and groaningly took stock of his surroundings. They eyed him malevolently, craning their red, obscenely bare necks, and croaked an assurance to each other that their feasting was only delayed a little while.

That messenger, however, was made of stern stuff. He was also strengthened by the knowledge that he was a trusted servant of the white *inkosi*—and the uniform of that service, though he was stripped naked, protected him. So he stifled his groans and collected the scattered, filth-stained letters. He spent some time in an utterly vain attempt to piece torn scraps together and return the letters to their proper envelopes. His final bewilderment was as complete as that a small child faced with the task of piecing together a gigantic and complicated jig-saw puzzle. He laughed ruefully, acknowledging his inability to perform the task, and making sure that he had not permitted one scrap of paper to elude him he replaced the untidy bundle of papers in the mail bag—

the rents of which he pinned together with long thorns—and continued his trek.

Africa played a second joke on him as he was fording the Letaba River just be-

fore sundown on that same day. Undoubtedly the beating he had received at the hands of the young warriors had dulled his senses, otherwise this second catastrophe would have passed him by for he was an experienced hunter. Had he been quite normal it is certain that he would have exercised more caution at the ford and would have avoided the terrible blow which knocked him headfirst into the water. That blow was delivered by the powerful tail of a twelve-foot crocodile. Fortunately the crocodile was actuated by panic—not hunger—and the messenger escaped with a ducking, but some time elapsed before he recovered the mail bag. When he did so, some of the papers it had contained floated down stream into deep water—where he dared not follow to retrieve them — and those which remained were little better than a wet pulpy mess.

He accepted this second disaster with a phlegmatic calm and set about performing a minor miracle in the way of making fire. Besides this fire he spread the soddened papers out to dry, then squatted on his haunches and warmed his chilled flesh.

Just as the night's darkness set in Africa struck again. Not altogether without warning this time. Low, coughing grunts from three near-by points in the bush announced the approaching danger and sent the messenger climbing swiftly into the top-most branches of a tree. That tree was heavily thorn-armored, but he was not aware of it; the thorns did not check the swiftness of his climb!

HE STAYED in that tree all night, clinging desperately to his precarious perch. Until the flames of his fire died down he could see three lions prowling restlessly up and down, back and forth, making wide detours to avoid the fire, their massive heads turned always toward the tree. When the darkness deepened—it was so heavy, so palpable that it seemed to blanket the fire—he could hear the *crunch, crunch* of their padded paws on the dry, sandy soil; he could hear their rasping breathing. Occasionally one roared a bullying challenge which silenced all the other night noises of the bush. Several times his tree refuge shook violently and he knew that the lions were either using it as a rubbing post or were standing up on their hind legs, their forepaws clinging to the trunk—reaching upward.

In the gray half-light of early morning the lions departed; the native messenger heard them pull down a zebra not far distant.

He descended from the tree, moving very gingerly, wincing as the thorns lacerated his flesh.

Once again he lighted a fire, wishing that he dared challenge the lions for a share of their kill. Then, when the warmth of the fire had restored life to his aching bones, he carefully collected the papers. Their condition was in no wise improved; some had been scuffled into the ground by the paws of the pacing lions, some were stinkingly contaminated by the saliva which had dripped from three hungry mouths, some—for all he knew to the contrary—had been scattered by the breeze which swept the sky in preparation for the sun's rising. He strengthened the crude repairs he had made to the mail bag, put in the letters and resumed his trek, faithful to his trust. Mentally, he pulled his hunger belt a notch tighter.

Sundown that night brought him to the post of Ranger Austen to whom he delivered the mail bag and made his report—it was very brief and matter-of-fact. He grinned happily at Ranger Austen's commendation, then went to the native quarters, ate an enormous meal and was asleep before he had completely masticated the last mouthful.

And Ranger Austen, a keen, intelligent youngster, full of enthusiasm for his job, conquered a not unnatural disappointment at the discovery that his home mail was

practically undecipherable and sat up until the hour was very late endeavoring to piece together the letter from his superior. That proved to be a hopeless task. He gathered from it—mostly by guess work—that a tourist hunter would probably visit his district; some Big Personage, evidently, for he was excused from holding a Game License and could shoot any class of Game he desire. He was even given permission to hunt in the Reserve!

"He's probably Royalty," Austen decided, "travelling incognito."

The Ranger made that deduction from two short sentences of the Warden's letter which remained perfectly legible.

"Don't be misled by appearances. He isn't what he appears to be."

Ranger Austen shrugged his shoulders and made ready for bed.

"I hope His Bigness doesn't show up, that's all," he muttered. "I don't want any trophy hunting butchers playing merry hell with the beasts in my district. Damn it, I've got a good mind to put up some notices: 'Please don't shoot the lions'!"

IN SPITE of the delayed delivery of the Game Warden's letter to Ranger Austen, news can travel swiftly in Africa even beyond the limits reached by telegraph and railways. Proof of this is in the fact that although the Major and Jim the Hottentot made a very early start from Johannesburg, the morning following the interview with the four men, heading for a farm where he had some time previously left his light trek wagon, mules and trek gear; and though he left that place without delay, travelling north by a little travelled route, he was early given a demonstration of what was in store for him.

This was at a small kaffir *invinkel* (store) which he reached on the evening of his first day's trek from Jo'burg.

As he pulled the eight mules to a halt the storekeeper—a dour Scot whose reputation for meanness was a by-word in the country—hurried out to greet him with an effusive show of hospitality; what is more, he gave every practical proof of the sincerity of his offers. When, the following morning, Scotty refused to accept any payment—either for the food he had supplied, the bait for the mules or a lot of kaffir trading truck which the Major had taken, more in order to test Scotty's sudden generosity than for any real need—the Major's suspicions were aroused.

"Have you taken complete leave of your jolly old senses, Scotty?" he asked.

"Eh, mon, ye may well ask," Scotty replied. "But it's not me that daft—forebye such foolish free-handedness is more than likely to drive me so. It's well that ye're not over-greedy, Major, or I'd have nothing left to trade wi' an' a month to go before the next supplies come in." Then he added quickly, "But if there's anything else ye want, ye've only to say the word."

The Major shook his head.

"I can't say anything, Scotty. I'm speechless."

"Then it's for the first time in your life, I'm thinking."

"I wonder—" the Major began, then stopped abruptly and gathered up the reins in his strong, sun-tanned hands. "So long, Scotty," he said. And to Jim, who sat on the driving seat beside him, he added, "Let's trek, Jim."

The Hottentot flourished the long driving whip making the lash snake out over the backs of the mules with a rifle-like report.

"Trek jou!" he shouted.

The mules broke into a canter and the northward trek was resumed.

The Major looked round to wave a final good-bye to Scotty. But that man did not see him or hear his hail; he was seated on an empty soap box just outside his store, his head in his hands, looking the picture of despair.

"Jim," the Major asked thoughtfully, as

he pulled the mules to a sober trot, "did you talk last night with the storekeeper's servants?"

"Yes, Baas," Jim chuckled. "I shared my food with them and it bought their tongues. The storekeeper does not feed them well."

"Yet the food you shared with them—he gave you, Jim."

"Truly, Baas. I have thought of that. It is strange, for it is well known that he gives nothing."

"Is it then, Jim, that he is planning some evil and wished us to leave his place—"

"*Au-a,* Baas. That talk is folly. He is no fool. He knows a man does not hasten from a place where he is well received. No, Baas. He may be mad—but he works no evil." The Hottentot chuckled again. "And his madness of giving is only as far as we are concerned. *Ou!* I heard him deal this morning with men who had come from the kraals to trade! He only gave *them* the roughness of his tongue."

The Major whistled softly and wondered what Scotty would do when he discovered the money the Major had left in payment for the goods he had taken. He found out about half an hour later when the storekeeper, riding a raw-boned, native-bred pony, caught up with the wagon.

"I told ye, mon," Scotty shouted angrily as he rode level with the wagon, "that everything in the store was yours for the asking. An' now—take this."

He threw a small packet into the wagon—it contained the money the Major had left in payment—wheeled his horse and galloped swiftly back to his store.

"Oh, damn!" the Major exclaimed helplessly. "That puts a fellow in a bally awkward predicament, what? Makes me feel like a down and out Sundowner, or some such. Somebody's playing a deep and dirty game at the jolly old cross-roads. Eh, what, Jim?"

"He's mad, Baas," the Hottentot said.

"Perhaps you're right, Jim. But if he is—something will have to be done about it."

HOWEVER, the Major was to discover many other men inflicted with a similar form of madness; that one incident was multiplied by many, making his progress northward an almost Royal one—most certainly it was a free one. It was not alone that he was given unstinted hospitality—that had always been his if he desired it—but the manner in which hospitality was thrust upon him. He could *buy* nothing. Several times he deliberately—and in a manner which afterwards made him go hot with self-anger—abused the hospitality shown to him, hoping to force a refusal of some of his demands. But none came. Everyone he met—traders, homesteaders, prospectors, transport riders, government officials and natives—all treated him to the freedom of their own individual spheres of influence. It seemed that he could ask nothing too much of them: their property was his and the laws which governed their life—moral and civil—did not exist as far as he was concerned. He gathered that he could, if he so wished, break all the laws and escape punishment.

At Vreeburg he bought a diamond from a notorious I.D.B. and boasted of his purchase—he even exhibited it!—in the presence of a detective. And nothing happened! He stole a salted horse—one that has had fly sickness and is therefore immune from further attacks — from the Commissioner at Jamestown, and the Commissioner sent a native messenger after him with the horse's bridle and saddle! The Major almost lost his temper with the messenger whom he had to threaten with a severe sjambokking before the man would consent to take the horse back to his master.

At a canteen in Pietersburg the Major behaved like a hooligan. He pretended to be truculently drunk and gave the occu-

pants of the canteen an exhibition of revolver marksmanship which made them gape in astonishment. It is true that he managed to reimburse the proprietor for the damage he had done—in a manner which made refusal impossible. But the act or reimbursement did not restore his dignity—specially as a police trooper who had witnessed the exhibition applauded his marksmanship instead of arresting him—and he left the *dorp* feeling that there was no more pleasure left in life.

Even Jim was bored with the ease which attended their travel. Jim liked nothing better than to match his wits against the natives he met. If, by cunning, he could get men to work for him, or to hold a beer drink in his honor, or to supply fodder for the animals, he was happy—and the fact that his Baas always made proper payment did not take the edge off his contentment. But now, natives appeared at every outspan offering their services; they guarded the grazing mules, fetched water, cut wood and built stout *scherms* of thorn bush as a protection from inquisitive lions. They even brought pots of beer for the Hottentot's refreshment and milk and their best fowls for the Major's.

The Major travelled swiftly from Pietersburg. For the first time in his life he demanded of the mules their best effort at a time when there was no need of haste.

His face was grim and his hands held the reins in an iron grip which flexed the muscles of his arms and gave a tense rigidity to his whole body. Jim was in a similar mood. He ceaselessly *slammed* the whip and shouted bitter insults to the mules in a harsh voice.

The two men did not speak to each other. Their eyes were fixed on the distant horizon, but the Major missed no unevenness of the veldt's surface and he swung the mules around piles of rock and clumps of thick bush with expert skill. The pace they travelled called for the best from animals and men; there were few white men in the country who could handle the reins as the Major handled them, there was not a man in the country who could approach the Hottentot's skill with the big whip. The mules were the best to be obtained—they had been broken and trained by the Major and Jim. The Hottentot could have driven them without touching the reins or whip but by voice alone.

BEFORE them the bush veldt stretched in an inviting vista. Directly behind them the view of the trail they had followed was blotted out by the thick clouds of dust churned up by the swiftly revolving wheels of the wagon.

They made a late outspan at a spot far distant from any kraal on the banks of the River Sand and there, as if remorse rode them, they groomed the mules with a savage intensity—as if to apologize for having over-driven them—watered them, gave them an unusually large feed and even made a bedding of sorts for them from rushes and grass. Then, the Major's bell tent having been erected and a large pile of wood collected, both men bathed and the Major put on a spotless, immaculately pressed suit of white drill while the Hottentot prepared skoff.

The Major ate his meal at a table, spread with white linen and set with spotless silverware, set just outside his tent. Jim waited on him with the efficient

aplomb of a well-trained man-servant. The meal was a good one—well balanced and perfectly cooked—and the Major ate with

an unfeigned appetite, and when Jim had brought him his coffee and lighted his cigarette his black, petulant mood began to dissolve into one of contentment.

Jim, too, taking his cue from his Baas, was happier and he sang softly as he cleared the table and prepared his own skoff which he ate beside the fire.

The moon rose high in the sky, its white light paling the mysterious glow of the stars. The air was clear and cool and no sound from beyond the outspan broke the peaceful silence.

The Major laughed softly as he stretched himself lazily in his deck chair.

"We have been fools, Jim," he said. "We have been like children, running for no cause other than a fear in our own minds."

"Maybe, Baas," Jim said guardedly. "And yet there is something I do not understand—and what I do not understand, I fear."

"There is wisdom in that, Jim. And something is happening which I, too, do not understand. Or—" he laughed softly —"perhaps I do. And if I am right, Jim, we are like men who have been robbed of the salt whereby they season their food."

"Au-a, Baas! This is a riddle you tell me—and a sad one, for there is little joy in unseasoned food."

"Or in taking when there is no one to say 'No, Jim'; or in following a trail others have made for us; or in a life in which there are no doubts, no obstacles, no risks."

"You mean, Baas?"

"It is all a matter of that reward of which I told you."

"The reward which you refused, Baas? And rightly, as I think. What man who has saved himself expects a reward other than that he lives?"

"There speaks the bally old original philosopher," the Major drawled in English. "I wish Carter, Van Ness *et al* would think the same instead of trying to act like giddy Caliphs of the Arabian Nights vintage." He continued in the Hottentot's speech, "I mean, Jim, the men whose rewards I refused are now seeking to thrust rewards upon us in their own peculiar way. It is at their order that things are as they are."

"That is something to know, Baas," Jim said, nodding his head sagely. "And that knowledge makes me easier in my mind. Truly, I was beginning to think that all the world was mad except us two."

"And even I am a little queer, eh, Jim?" The Major laughed. "But that, I think, is the way of it."

"And is there no way to avoid this flood of rewards, Baas?" Jim asked in dismay. "We will be like overfed dogs who can no longer take part in the hunt. We will grow old and fat and death will come slowly and miserably to us."

"Yet," the Major bantered. "I've heard Jim the Hottentot sigh many times for the ease of great wealth. I've heard him say that he would be content to sit in the sun outside his hut, watching his women grind the corn and the herd boys taking his cattle out to the grazing grounds. All this, and more, is within reach of your hand, Jim. If you desire it, stretch out your hand and take it."

"Not I, Baas. Perhaps when I am old I will go back to the kraals—or I will go before that should you have no further need of me; though, in that case, I doubt if I should live to see the place where my women wait for me. *Wo-we,* how long they have waited! But until then, here there is sun, and no huts to cast a shadow. Here are my cattle. *Wu,* what cattle! Elephants, giraffe, buck, zebra. And for herd boys—I will use lions and wild dogs. As for my wives—the cries of the 'Go-away' birds is all that I need to remind me of them." Jim's gesture of contempt was devastatingly graphic and the Major laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"But how are we to avoid these re-

wards which are being heaped upon us, Baas?" Jim continued. *"Wo-we!* Do you think the buck will walk up to the muzzle of our guns, and snakes forget their gift of death, and crocodiles forget their hunger, and lions—*Au-a!* Are all the creatures of the bush under the orders of those men?"

THE Major laughed.

"Ask me that next time a hyena steals from your cook pot—as one is doing now!"

Jim jumped to his feet, shouting angry curses, and rushed at a hyena which had crept up unobserved and was now hungrily gulping down the remains of Jim's meal.

The beast snarled, bared its fangs then turned and galloped clumsily away.

"Au-a!" Jim grumbled as he returned and squatted down on his haunches beside the Major. "The stinking *schelm!* If they were all killed — who would be poorer?"

"They kill the old and the weak, Jim —and so help to keep the herds strong."

"True, Baas. I had forgotten. And that comes home to us. If no difficulties are put in our way, we shall become soft before our time."

"Therefore, Jim, we must find a way of avoiding the gifts we do not want. There are, I think, two ways open before us; we can either go to a country where the words of those four men carry no authority, or we can—to outward seeming, at least—cease to be the men we are."

"Let us do both, Baas," Jim said promptly. "Then perhaps we will be able to live in our own way."

The Major nodded thoughtfully.

"It should not be difficult, Jim. We will go to the kraal of Mzila—you know it. It is not far from here. Mzila and his people are, in some small way, in our debt—"

"They owe their lives to you, Baas," Jim amended grimly. "But for you they would now all be dead, or worse than dead. *Au-a!* You saved them from slavery and—"

"It is a long time ago, Jim," the Major interrupted. "We must not put too much credit on ourselves. Perhaps the people have forgotten us and what we did."

"If they have, I will teach them to remember," Jim said. "But you will find that they have not forgotten. And so—we will go to them, you say?"

"Yes, Jim. And there we will lose our names and everything which makes us the men we are."

"Wo-we! That will be magic making indeed, Baas. But, to outward seeming, we will do that. And then?"

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"We will go into the Portuguese country, Jim. There we will hunt, or trade—or perhaps we will look for gold. I do not know what we will do for I do not know what will cross our trail. Nor does that matter. At the moment, only one thing concerns me and that—to escape the yoke of freedom which has been put upon us."

He rose and went into his tent. In a very little while he was asleep on his bed, protected from the night flying pests by the mosquito net which shrouded him. But Jim found sleep hard to win. He was disturbed by the laughter of hyenas.

THEY arrived at Mzila's kraal three days later and were greeted with an almost frenzied demonstration of hospitality, proving that Mzila's people had not forgotten the debt that they owed to the Major.

Mzila, the headman, was eager to celebrate the occasion and do honor to his guests by holding a big beer drink to which he proposed to invite the inhabitants of all kraals within a two-day trek. He was greatly disappointed when this opportunity of demonstrating his gratitude was denied him, but announced that he was prepared to do all that he could to further the Major's plan once it had been explained to him.

In a very short space of time the Major's mules were distributed amongst various kraals. The wagon was dismantled and, with its non-perishable contents, cunningly hidden. So, too, were the Major's tin uniform cases.

The Major stayed for four days at Mzila's kraal, leaving it at sun-up on the morning of the fifth day.

Jim, carrying a rifle, led the way. Then followed two well-laden pack donkeys which the Major had purchased from Mzila. The Major walked behind the donkeys. He looked like a not too prosperous prospector. His face was bearded. His clothes patched and travel-stained. On his head he wore a battered felt hat. He did not wear his monocle—indeed, he looked as if he never could have worn a monocle. He walked with head bent; his gait was a slouching one.

Mzila, the headman, accompanied them until they came to a forking of the trails.

"Now here I must leave you, *inkosi,* if that is your will," he said. *"Au-a!* If *my* will were permitted, I would come with you and serve you. *Is* it permitted, *inkosi?"*

"No, Mzila," the Major said.

"Wo-we! But for you to travel this way, *inkosi,* is not seemly. See! It is not too late. Say the word and I will send my young men with you. They will serve you without pay. Nay, they will be paid by serving you."

"No, Mzila," the Major said again. "And now our ways no longer run together. I go—what does it matter *where* I go? Your path leads back to your kraal. You say you wish to serve me. I have told you what that service must be. You will keep your lips closed—you and all your people—should any one question you concerning me."

"The man you were is dead," Mzila exclaimed. "Your words have killed him in our minds—but not in our hearts. The name you bore is dead also. How can we talk of the man you were or tell of that one's whereabouts?" He paused, then added with a laugh, "But when once again you decide to be the man you were, answering to that one's name, come to us, *inkosi,* and let us pay you the honor that is your due. And now—go in Peace, *inkosi."*

He stood on one side and raised his hand in salutation.

"Aye. Remain in peace, Mzila," the Major replied, and he slapped the hindmost donkey on the rump with the flat of his hand, urging it to better speed.

THAT night the Major and Jim camped on the banks of the Pufuri River and despite the comparative meagerness of their equipment, their camp was a comfortable one and the food they ate appetising and sufficient. There was not a better camp cook in all Africa than Jim—unless it was the Major. There was no one more expert in the art of trekking and trek-comfort than the Major—unless it was Jim, the Hottentot.

The Major's meal consisted of game birds, buck stew and fragrant coffee. Jim was satisfied with a more spartan meal, though had he wished he could have eaten a meal similar to the Major's.

Jim rolled himself in his blankets and slept close to the fire which he awoke to replenish—almost automatically and without a conscious breaking of the rhythm of sleep—several times during the night. The Major's bed was as soft and as springy as any of the elaborate contrivances which modern civilization has produced to secure easeful sleep for the weary; he had constructed it himself while Jim prepared skoff. Yet, if the occasion had demanded it, if there had been no young bush or soft, feathery grass close to the outspan, the Major could have slept just as soundly on the iron-hard veldt.

The following morning they crossed the Pufuri River. Their passage was watched by the mild eyes of numerous buck who had come down to drink. Even when the

men and donkeys scrambled up the steep bank from the bed of the river, the buck did not stampede but only moved off a few hundred feet at a sober trot.

"Wo-we!" Jim exclaimed in dismay. "It is as I feared. A spell has been put upon everything. There is no more joy in life left to us. We can no longer hunt. The wild beasts are your cattle. They will come up to slaughter when you call them."

The Major laughed:

"That is not the way of it, Jim," he said. "It is only that, in crossing the river, we have entered a country set aside by the Government as a sanctuary for all wild beasts. We are now in the Singwitsi Reserve. Here men are forbidden to kill—and the beasts know it."

"Is that the way of it, Baas?" Jim said with a sigh of relief. "Then what do we do here, if we may not hunt? Or do we hunt in defiance of the Government's word?"

"No, Jim. We do not hunt. There would be no more pleasure in it than shooting a herd of cows. You have seen —the buck are tame. And we have food enough to last until we have passed through the sanctuary and come to the country ruled by the Portuguese."

They trekked in silence then, a companionable silence, until—it was almost time for the mid-day halt—they came to a large rock-strewn clearing. And in the center of that clearing a pride of lions sprawled, lazily sunning themselves like so many cats.

"Is it a sanctuary for them, too, Baas?" Jim whispered, coming to a stop.

"Yes, Jim," the Major replied.

"And do they know the law, Baas?"

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"But if they attacked us, Baas—what then?" Jim persisted.

"Then we may kill to save ourselves—though, truly, I do not think we could save ourselves that way if so many attacked us. But of that I have no fear. They have recently fed and—"

"A lion is always hungry, Baas," Jim interrupted. "Or if he is not hungry, he is curious. Come, let us turn aside before they see us or a change of breeze carries our scent to them. Come!"

"There is no need for haste, Jim," the Major said. "Look! We have hunted together—how many years?—but never have we seen so many lions together in one place. There are ten, eleven — no, there is another one behind that rock! Twelve lions, Jim. And not a weakling amongst them."

"Their numbers only add to my fear, Baas," Jim said dolefully. "And their condition does not interest me, though perhaps I would like it better if they were all puny cubs. I can admire only a dead lion, Baas. *Wo-we!* I can laugh at a dead lion."

But in spite of his expressed concern the Hottentot was just as fascinated by the magnificent spectacle of the grouped lions as was the Major. It was difficult to believe that each one was a powerful and remorseless killer, that the smallest of them could crush in a man's skull with one playful blow of a padded paw. Unarmed, a man stood not a slightest chance against one of them. Armed only with the weapons of the natives of the country, a man would still have a very poor chance of gaining a victory over the weakest of the lions. High powered rifles weighted the scales in favor of man, but even then—

But these beasts were completely relaxed and off guard. Their purrs of contentment mingled with the somnolent drone of insects.

AND then, like a jester's laugh in the presence of death, one of the donkey's brayed.

The change that raucous note affected was electrifying. The lions leaped to their feet and magestically faced toward the intruders upon their leisure; and that seemed to be the measure of their anger—

that they had been caught at undignified play, that their play had been a cause for mocking laughter.

One or two snarled, making hideous masks of their dignified faces. One or two, crouching belly down, tails lashing, crawled toward the intruders.

The Major's rifle was at the ready. He was no longer merely an admiring observer. He knew that the donkey's bray had torn down the barrier of unawareness and indifference which had previously been a protection. Whereas until that moment he and Jim had been as safe as if they had been standing before caged lions, their predicament was now similar to what it would have been if the bars of the cage were suddenly removed.

Jim was also prepared to open fire. He stood close to the Major. A light of laughter danced in his eyes.

Both men stood perfectly still.

The donkeys grazed unconcernedly.

"What now, Baas? Do we kill—or claim sanctuary?" Jim whispered.

"I don't know yet," the Major replied as he pivoted a little so that he could face a young male lion which had crept forward in advance of the others. As he did so, the beast halted its progress and, like a circus beast meeting the eye of its trainer, dropped motionless to the ground.

Jim laughed softly.

"There would be nothing to fear from that one—if he were alone, Baas."

"He is young, Jim," the Major replied. "He wishes to show off."

The Major knew, so did Jim, that their position was a precarious one and he blamed himself for not having acted on the Hottentot's advice when the lions had been first sighted. He knew, as do all experienced hunters, that a lion's behavior under any given set of conditions is absolutely unpredictable. The act which today might make him turn tail will, like as not, on the morrow be sufficient to make him charge against overwhelming odds.

There was only one right way to meet this situation, but many wrong ones, and it was not possible to find the right way by a trial and error process of elimination. Error in this case meant the elimination of Jim and himself. There was no doubt about that.

"And now I know how Daniel must have felt in the lions' den," he muttered. "And I don't like it. 'Pon my soul, I don't."

"The Baas says?" Jim asked.

"Nothing—only folly, Jim."

"If the Baas turned and ran," Jim said, "there is a thorn tree—"

"I cannot run, Jim. But the tree is still there for you."

"*Wo-we!* And I cannot climb, Baas. But the lions, Baas; they are, as you said, well fed. They are not hungry. Therefore their anger is not at us but at the donkey which laughed at them. Let us therefore drive the donkeys forward as a sacrifice and a peace offering."

"There is wisdom in that, Jim," the Major said. "To wait here, doing nothing, is perhaps death. To run, is death. To fire—"

"*Au-a,* Baas!" Jim interrupted. "Death may be the penalty for anything we do. Therefore — let us go forward, and quickly. They are getting too close."

"You speak my mind, Jim," the Major agreed.

With as little concern, outwardly at any rate, as if they were advancing toward a flock of goats, the Major and Jim drove the donkeys forward, shouting abuse and encouragement. They acted as if they were totally oblivious of the presence of the lions.

The beasts snarled menacingly and batted the air with their forepaws. They drew back a little, bunching together directly in the path of the donkeys. They looked as if they were considering a massed charge.

And then — the suddenness of it was breath-taking—they whirled and loped off swiftly into the bush. There was no suggestion of panic in their departure, but rather one of contempt.

The Major, Jim and the donkeys came to a halt.

"Phew!" the Major exclaimed and taking off his hat he mopped his head and face with a handkerchief. Jim laughed almost hysterically. The donkeys trembled. They were black with sweat.

The Major sat down on a boulder and Jim commenced the boasting song of a victorious hunter. But he could not finish it.

"*Au-a,* Baas!" he exclaimed. "They ran. But not from us. They ran because it pleased them to run. We live, Baas, because their pleasure took them from us instead of toward us."

"Or perhaps, Jim," the Major said slowly, "we live because they respected the sanctuary this place gives all things."

"I think you are right, Baas, but if I had said that, you would have laughed. *Au-a!* This is a story to tell—and no one will believe it!"

A few minutes later they resumed their trek, exhibiting an almost exaggerated caution, for the encounter with the lions had shaken their nerves. They made wide detours to avoid patches of thick bush or elephant grass which might provide cover for lurking lions. They kept their rifles at the ready and kept a sharp scrutiny on the bush about them. The *booming* of a cock ostrich almost stampeded them into a panic-stricken flight—but after that their tension relaxed and they proceeded more normally. But when they made camp that night they selected a site with more than usual care and built a stout stockade of thorn bush. And they collected sufficient wood to have lasted them, normally, through nine or ten nights, and lighted two enormous fires.

Yet, that done, the donkeys watered, fed and tethered for the night, their own appetites satisfied, the two men slept easily, and were not disturbed by the roars of hunting lions which trembled the air.

THEIR awakening the following morning, however, was an abrupt one. For once the Hottentot failed to give his Baas a timely warning of impending danger; for once, the Major was caught asleep.

Jim awoke to find himself a prisoner. Two muscular natives held his arms. The hand of a third was clapped over his mouth, thus preventing him from warning his Baas.

The Major was awakened by a booted foot prodding, not over gently, against his ribs.

"What's the idea?" he asked in a rough voice as he scrambled to his feet. He was relieved to see that he had a white official to deal with. The natives who held Jim, the other natives who stood behind the white man, wore uniforms. "What's the idea?" he asked again.

"That's something you're going to tell me," Ranger Austen said curtly. "And don't tell me that you didn't know this was the Singwitsi Game Reserve, because I won't believe it."

"Oh, I knew that," the Major replied. "I suppose," he added, "you're a Ranger?"

"Yes. Austen is my name. Have you got a hunting permit—not that that would help you in this district."

"No, I haven't," the Major replied crossly. "I haven't got a permit—and I ain't hunting."

Austen laughed.

"That's quite right—you ain't," he mocked, imitating the Major's coarse voice. "That's because I'm here to see that you don't.

"And I suppose," Austen continued, "you'll next tell me that you know nothing of my herd of elephants and that you had no intention of poaching ivory."

"Oh, use your sense," the Major protested. "What sort of ivory poaching could I do—me with one nigger to help. How do you expect I'd carry the tusks away? In my pocket? Now I'll tell you, mister; I happen to be here just because I'm taking a short cut across the reserve to Portuguese Territory."

Austen shook his head.

"And what are you going to do there?" he asked.

"That, mister," the Major said forcefully, "is none of your blamed business."

Austen hesitated. He was not quite sure of his ground.

"Well," he said finally, "you've no business in my reserve, frightening my animals—"

"Not half as much as they've frightened me," the Major interrupted. "You've got too many lions here, mister. They'll drive your buck away, first thing you know. Yesterday me and the nigger walked through a pack of them. I counted twenty-three. If you don't believe me, you'll find the *spoor* back there—that is, if you're able to read the *spoor*."

"I can and I did," Austen said briefly. "There were eleven, possibly twelve lions. No more. They're some of my assistants, if you understand what I mean. They help to keep up the health of my herds of buck. They kill off the weak—survival of the fittest. But perhaps you're right; perhaps they are getting too numerous. I'll have to have a census."

The Major paid Austen the compliment of regarding him with renewed interest.

"You seem to know a lot for a youngster," he remarked, "and I bet my boots you ain't been in the country more than a year or so."

Austen flushed.

"Long enough to learn my job," he said briefly. "But we're discussing you; why didn't you shoot a lion or two yesterday? Was it because you were afraid shots would betray your whereabouts?"

"Now you are talking like a greenhorn," the Major said contemptuously. "To hear you talk, anybody'd think lions was in the same class as guinea fowl. Why didn't I shoot a lion or two! Because I was afraid to, damned afraid. That's why. But the fires I lighted last night didn't look as if I was trying to hide, did they?"

"No, but they might have been signal fires."

"You've been reading too many Penny Dreadfuls—that's what's the matter with you," was the Major's reply to that.

Austen flushed again. He looked at his watch.

"I'm giving you until sunset to get out of the Reserve," he said stiffly. "If you are in the district after that time, you will be arrested. And I am not sure that I'm not making a mistake in granting you that much leeway."

"You've got no right to order me about that way," the Major protested.

"I've told you what you're to do," Austen said calmly. "I'm in full charge here and I'm not going to have stray tramps like you roaming through the Reserve. That's all. There are no grounds for debate. If you're in the Reserve after sundown, you'll be arrested. Good morning."

He mounted his horse and rode off, followed by his native assistants.

The Major chuckled as Jim sheepishly joined him.

"*Wo-we*, Baas," Jim exclaimed. "There has been a shame put upon us. They caught us as easily as if we knew nothing. *Au-a!* Perhaps it is that we have suddenly become old. Perhaps it would be better if we accepted the rewards that have been offered us."

The Major laughed.

"There is no shame, Jim. We were caught because we trusted to the sanctuary to protect us—as indeed it did, for we are unharmed. Also, the young *inkosi*

is no fool. At least, he is not a very big fool. He knows the bush and the animals in it. He—"

"Did he know you, Baas?"

The Major shook his head.

"No, Jim. This he said—"

And he gave the Hottentot a quick résumé of his conversation with the Ranger.

"Au-a," Jim exclaimed as the Major concluded, "he is indeed very young! 'My buck!' he says. And the lions are *his* servants! *Wo-wel* And he gives us until sun-down to leave *his* country! So we stay, Baas?"

The Major shook his head.

"No, Jim. Who are we to make a mock of a young man's pride in his work? No. We will leave him to his animals and his kingdom. And we will obey his command. Before sundown we will be out of the Reserve. So let us have skoff. Then we will trek."

He added a few minutes later:

"Besides, Jim, he did not know us. And I think he is a man of his word. If we disobeyed him he would arrest us—"

"He could not," Jim interrupted scornfully, "unless you permitted it, Baas."

The Major ignored the Hottentot's remark and continued:

"He would arrest us and take us before someone in authority over him who would know us. That would mean we would have to plan our escape from reward all over again."

And so these two who only yesterday had faced the lions, these two who had in the past fought times without number against overwhelming odds, now meekly obeyed the orders of a very youthful Ranger. And this despite the fact that they could have played hide and seek with him in his own Reserve—and he could not have found them.

THEY traveled as swiftly as the pace of the donkeys permitted, making but a brief mid-day halt, selecting the easiest and shortest way through the bush in a manner which suggested that they were familiar with the country. They were aware, though they did not betray that knowledge, that they were followed by several natives and the Major had a shrewd belief that Ranger Austen was not far behind.

This belief was justified when they made their evening outspan close to a water-hole just beyond the border of the Reserve in Portuguese territory.

"Better come and have skoff with us," the Major called.

After a short delay the Ranger rode somewhat sheepishly up to the outspan.

"That was a good bit of trekking you did," he said with ungrudging admiration. "You made it with a couple of hours to spare. I take it that you've made this trip more than once."

"No, this is the first time," the Major replied, still disguising his voice. "Come on, now. Off saddle, Ranger and have a bite with us. I don't harbor any ill-feelings about the way you've ordered me out of the Reserve."

"I oughtn't to," Ranger Austen said slowly. "I'm out of my territory and—"

"Well, that'll not cause an international row, Ranger. You're not all that important."

The Ranger hesitated, but the appetizing smell of Jim's cooking defeated him. He shouted an order to his native rangers, then gladly accepted the Major's invitation.

And after they had eaten he stayed and talked with the Major, and Jim, learning from their vast store of experience things about the country, the people and the creatures of the wild. Eager to hear yet more he slept at the Major's outspan in order to continue the conversation on the following morning as that man broke his fast before making a very early start.

"By jove!" he exclaimed as he saddled his horse. "I wish I had you under me. I'd make my Reserve the best in the world.

But, of course, to be just I'd have to be under you. Look here, I'm afraid I acted like a bit of a swine yesterday morning. I was full of my own importance. Won't you forget all that and come and stay at my station for a few days? You could teach me no end of things I ought to know."

The Major shook his head though, liking Austen and his keen enthusiasm, it would have taken very little persuasion to have made him change his mind.

At that moment Jim—who had climbed a nearby kop in order to get a view of the country ahead—came running up to them.

"What is it, Jim?" the Major asked, seeing that the Hottentot was very excited.

Jim's reply was in the Hottentot's own clicking dialect and when he had finished the Major turned to Austen.

"This is something that'll interest you more than me," he said. "Jim says that he sighted a big outfit heading for the Reserve south of here."

Austen's face fell.

"Oh blast!" he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten him. I'll have to go. All I hope is that he doesn't want to kill off all my elephants."

The Major looked at him wonderingly.

"You can always order him out of the Reserve—same as you did me," he said coldly.

"That's just it—I can't," Austen wailed. "How far away did your native say he was?"

"If you ride hard," the Major said slowly, "you ought to be on hand to greet him about sundown."

Ranger Austen hesitated a moment, considering whether he should or should not tell this chance-met traveller about the important visitor the Warden had warned him to expect. For some reason—after all he was very young—he decided to make a mystery of it.

"I must be off," he said hurriedly as he mounted his horse. He added, foolishly, reverting to his official manner of yesterday, "and see that you keep out of my Reserve if you know what's good for you."

With that he spurred his horse and rode swiftly away.

A FEW moments later he was heard shouting instructions to his natives who were camped just inside the Reserve, telling them to follow him without delay. There was an excited commotion for a little while—then silence. The Ranger and his assistants had gone to welcome "an important visitor."

"What is it, Baas?" Jim asked watching the Major's frowning face.

"I don't know, Jim," the Major replied. "There is something in the wind which I do not understand."

"Is it something to do with the young *inkosi*, Baas?"

The Major nodded.

"Where does he go? Why did he leave you so quickly, Baas."

"He goes to meet the people you saw trekking toward the Reserve."

Jim grinned.

He said, "They will not easily be turned aside by one man."

"That is not his intention, Jim. He goes to welcome them. I think they come at his bidding."

"Au-a!" Jim exclaimed. "Is that the way of it? He betrays his trust. Well—he is not the first. And it is not our *indaba*."

"It is, Jim," the Major replied. "For two reasons."

"One reason is always sufficient for you

to go this way or that, Baas. And so, one reason—or none, save that I follow you —is sufficient for me. But what are your reason for making that one's folly our *indaba?*"

"He ordered us from the Reserve, Jim. My pride is hurt. He acted one thing and hid himself behind a front of lies. He made fools of us—"

"Or thinks he did," the Hottentot commented softly.

"That is one reason," the Major continued, ignoring Jim's comment. "To prove that we are *not* fools, we make his folly our *indaba.* And the second reason —*au-a,* he is very young! He may find that his folly will recoil on his own head. Besides—there are the animals."

Jim grunted.

"Yes. There are the animals, Baas," he echoed sarcastically. "Yesterday we walked through a herd of lions. And now we invite ourselves to a meeting of men who are *schelms.* Well, we have done that before. Perhaps they, too, will run from us."

The Major nodded.

"I travel swiftly, Jim," he said as he expertly did up his blanket roll and made a small pack of food.

"Then you will have to carry one donkey and I the other, Baas."

The Major shook his head.

"I am trekking alone, Jim. You will come on at the donkey's pace."

"But no, Baas!" Jim protested.

"But yes, Jim," the Major said decidedly. "And I go now. You will follow at the best speed you can—with the donkeys."

"I do not like it, Baas," Jim grumbled. "You will need me and— *Au-a,* Baas, I am your dog! You order, I obey. But the Baas will take great care?"

"Great care, Jim," the Major answered.

LONG before noon the Major caught up with Ranger Austen's native assistants. At first their attitude was definitely hostile. They were Government servants, they wore the uniform of their service and they were loyal to that service and to the young *inkosi* who was their immediate superior.

It was typical of the Major that he respected the loyalty of the natives and betrayed no impatience or resentment when they went through the form of arresting him. Instead he talked with them calmly of their work and of their young *inkosi,* gradually breaking down their suspicion until he finally brought them to accepting him as a man to be trusted—*and* obeyed.

Nor did it take the Major long to discover that he had misjudged Austen in believing that that man was hastening to meet an ivory poacher who was also his confederate.

Austen had talked freely — perhaps a little too freely—to his natives about the impending visit of an important white *inkosi* and had shown open resentment at the Warden's orders—or what part of them he had been able to decipher from the mutilated letter—concerning his treatment of the visitor.

All this the natives now related to the Major together with the story of the adventure of the mail bag—for of course all stories have a beginning, and the natives told the whole story. That is their way and the Major was too well versed in their psychology to attempt to force them along mental short cuts.

He found not a little cause for mirth in the story, for it was evident to him that he was the important white *inkosi* the Warden had written about, and but for the chance intervention of Fate he would now be Ranger Austen's honored guest.

But there was a grim side to the story which killed all thought of laughter; who were these men Ranger Austen was now hastening to meet? What would their reception of him be when he blundered innocently upon the scene of their operations?

He spoke to the natives of his fears

and was relieved to find that they did not question the truth of his deductions. Their fear matched his.

"But what can we do, *inkosi?*" they wailed. "The young *inkosi—wo-we,* he is our father! He rides fast. He will come to camp of these evil men—if they are evil—suspecting nothing."

"Therein, perhaps, lies his safety," the Major replied. "Suspecting nothing he will do nothing and they, thinking him a fool, will not harm him."

"But if his suspicions are awakened, what then, *inkosi?*"

"Then, I think," the Major said gravely, "death will blind his eyes and close his mouth! So we must go to him before his suspicion awakes. Now do you follow me, obeying me in all things—or do you go your own way?"

"We are your men, *inkosi,* in this matter. But what our young *inkosi* bids us to do with you when this business is over—that we will do."

"It is well," the Major said with a laugh. "Now let us go. We have talked enough." But before they could leave the place they were joined by Jim, the Hottentot.

"Where are the donkeys, Jim?" the Major demanded sternly.

Jim laughed.

"I met two men from Mzila's kraal, Baas. They said they were searching for goats which had strayed from the grazing grounds. I left the donkeys with them. They follow at their own pace."

The Major nodded.

"Come then, Jim. We have far to go and the need, I think, is urgent."

One of Austen's natives led the way, for the Reserve was his home and he could lead them on a course cutting across certain detours which Austen—by reason of the fact that he was on horseback—would be forced to make.

SILAS HART was having serious trouble with his native carriers. They were mutinous, though not one of them had yet made any overt act. But Hart understood natives well enough to know that they would desert him at the first opportunity if he did not at once assert his authority and impress them with his might. The manner in which he did this was typical of the man; it demonstrated at once his lack of conscience and his gross brutality.

He strode up and down amongst the rows of native who sat sullenly, silently, beside their unopened packs. He cursed them. He promised them rich rewards and, finally, he lashed them with his sjambok, staining their gleaming black skins with blood.

"Wu! It is enough," Hart's gun-bearer exclaimed fearfully. "I think they will listen to you now."

Hart turned on the native.

"They'd better," he snarled. "If there's any more trouble I'll shoot one or two and flog the rest till they can't stand. You, too, Tikkey!"

The big native passed his hand across his face, hiding the expression of hate which gleamed for a moment in his eyes.

"Yes, boss," he said, meekly enough.

Hart relaxed a little.

"What's the matter with the swine?" he demanded. "I've promised them good pay and they were eager to come on this trip with me. What's changed them?"

"They are fools, boss," the gun bearer said, veiling the sarcasm of his words by the humility of his bearing. "They cannot eat promises. They can only think of today—never of tomorrow. The pay you promised them—*au-a!* The day of payment is long off and therefore it means nothing to them. But the beatings you gave them yesterday and the days before, the beatings you gave them today—those memories are still with them, as the pain is with them!"

"They'd better remember the beatings!" Hart growled. "If I have any more trouble they will feel the full weight of my anger."

"Boss!" the gunbearer protested. "You

can do no more than kill them. They remember that one has already died under your fist."

Hart spat contemptuously.

"He was no man. He was no stronger than a chicken. Now tell them to make camp and perpare skoff. Hurry! I am tired and hungry."

The gun bearer, glad of an excuse to get away from Hart, relayed the man's orders to the carriers—and those orders were obeyed in sullen silence.

Hart laughed.

"That's brought the swine to heel!" he muttered. Opening his own pack he took out a bottle of whiskey and retired with it to a tree stump on which he sat. From that place he could supervise the work of the carriers.

He was immensely pleased with himself. If all went well he would be out of the Reserve and in Portuguese Territory again by this time tomorrow; and each of his carriers would be carrying an elephant tusk. He had planned this poaching trip very carefully, and he had no doubt of its success. The elephants were here—and he drank a sarcastic toast to the Government which had protected them so carefully for him!—and because they were accustomed to the sanctuary of the Reserve it was not likely that they would stampede or change their feeding ground overnight. Tomorrow morning—Hart drank again and chuckled gleefully—the slaughter would commence and finish. Quick action! That was Hart's motto. And to make sure his poaching would be very rapid he intended to do his hunting with a machine-gun. He knew exactly how it would work. He had tried it before in the Belgian Congo. He would direct his fire at the legs of the forest giants, hopelessly crippling as many as possible before they stampeded, and then finish them off at his leisure. It was a sure and, for him, a safe method of hunting.

There could be only one obstacle to a successful carrying out of his plan—and that obstacle was a very minor one. The Game Ranger might appear on the scene! Hart knew that the Ranger was very young. It might be possible to bluff him, or even to bribe him. If that failed, however, Hart was a firm believer in the old adage regarding dead men and their inability to tell tales.

The sun had set. The carriers had lighted two fires. Most of them sat about one, huddled together, silent, waiting for their cook pot to boil. At the other fire Hart's gun bearer was preparing his boss's food.

Hart laughed. He had triumphed. He had made his niggers come to heel. His hunters kept a keen watch. No one could take them by surprise; therefore, no one could take Hart by surprise.

NO ONE did take the natives by surprise. Long before Ranger Austen's arrival they heard the patter of his horse's feet and correctly estimated the time of his arrival. But they did not report their knowledge to the ivory poacher. That was their revenge for his brutal treatment of them.

And so Hart was completely off guard when, as the sunset's afterglow was swiftly fading from the sky, Ranger Austen rode out of the gloom of the bush into the circle of light thrown by the camp fires.

Hart sprang to his feet with a curse and reached for his revolver.

"How do you do, sir," Austen said as he stiffly dismounted and saluted. "I'm the Ranger in charge of this district. I've been expecting you."

Hart thought Austen was attempting to be humorous at his expense.

"Have you now?" he said. "And what in hell do you think you are going to do —alone."

Ranger Austen stared at him. "He's a swipe! A rank outsider," he told himself, and thought Hart was annoyed because he had not been given a more ceremonious welcome to the Reserve.

"Well, you see," Austen said apologetically, "I didn't know when you would arrive or where. But I got here as soon as I could and some of my men will be here in

the morning. We will try to show you good sport, sir. I am instructed to give you the freedom of the Reserve. But I hope you won't want to do any shooting. You see—"

It was quite by chance—a nervous reflex action more than anything else—that Ranger Austen's hand fumbled for and rested on his revolver holster. Such a move could only have one interpretation to a man like Hart, and he acted swiftly. He drew his own revolver and fired.

Ranger Austen spun around as the heavy bullet tore into him and he dropped silently to the ground.

Hart bent over and callously turned him over, noting the course of his shot with brutal satisfaction. There was an expression of hurt surprise on Austen's face. It was as if he were asking, "Why did you do that?"

"This is a bad business, Boss!"

Hart looked up and saw his gun-bearer standing beside him. The other natives were huddled together behind him.

"Have you killed him, Boss?" the gun-bearer continued.

"No. He'll live—perhaps. But whether he lives or dies—what matter? It is sure that he will not interfere with our hunt."

The gun-bearer shook his head.

"It is a bad business. We have no part in it."

And the natives behind him muttered:

"We will give witness that we had no part in the killing."

Hart rose quickly to his feet and faced them. He remembered suddenly that he had not been warned of Austen's approach. That was a matter which he would now take up with them. They backed slowly away from him, nearer to the dark shadows of the bush, away from the flickering light of the fires.

"You swine!" he yelled. "Stand still and listen! If you had warned me of this fool's coming I would have been ready for him and this would not have happened. But you did not hear. Your wits slept. Or perhaps you heard and wilfully kept your mouths shut. And so—his blood is on your heads. And so, I must beat you again—all of you. Come nearer. Come nearer, I say!"

The natives moved—backward. He could scarcely see them. They were no more than shadows which were being swallowed up by the swift-falling darkness.

"Do you hear me?" he yelled. "Come nearer.

He waited, listening. He could detect no movement. He heard no sound.

He raised his revolver and fired rapidly. There were no dull thuds to tell him his shots had hit a living target. There were no groans of men hard hit. There was no crash of falling bodies. He reloaded frantically and fired again at shadows which moved forward narrowing the circle of fire light. He whirled rapidly and fired at yet other shadows—which were shadows.

He knew then that the natives had deserted. He shouted, offering extravagant rewards if they would only return. He ran about the clearing like one demented—but never going beyond the radius of the fires' light—cursing, begging, threatening.

Only a brooding silence answered him; a silence which frightened him; a silence which filled him with all the fears of Africa.

Time passed.

The darkness deepened as the fires died down. In the distance the voices of hunting lions vibrated the air. Nearer, an elephant calf squealed in terror and was reassured by the low chuckling laughter of the cows.

Hart felt terribly lonely and afraid—for like most bullies he was a gross coward. He suddenly remembered the man he had shot. Things might be worse, he told himself. He would hold the Ranger as a hostage for his own safety. And in any case, the boy would be company for him now.

He groped his way beyond the fire light to the place where the Ranger had fallen. He was not there. He had gone!

Cursing, Hart stumbled back to his machine-gun. He visualized the Ranger leading the natives to attack him. He crouched behind the gun and sprayed the darkness with lead. The chatter of the gun was like the maniacal laughter of some giant ape.

When his fear-born rage died down he ceased firing and a silence once again engulfed him.

He laughed softly. He visualized the ground beyond the clearing littered with the dead bodies of the ranger and natives.

"I'm safe now!" he exulted. "Now I can sleep."

But sleep failed him. All night he sat beside the machine-gun, drinking, staring into the darkness, misinterpreting the night's noises.

At intervals he opened fire.

THE spasmodic bursts of firing which silenced the normal noises of the night spurred the Major and those with him to a faster pace and destroyed all desire to rest.

They raced through the darkness, avoiding pitfalls in the shape of bogs and thorn bush, steep *dongas* and rock outcrops, with an instinct which is part of an experienced hunter's equipment.

When the first sound of firing reached them they had deduced that Ranger Austen had been a victim and they made a grim resolve to punish his murderer.

Subsequent reports could only mean, they conjectured, that the ivory poacher had commenced his work of slaughter.

"*Au-a*, Baas!" Jim exclaimed. "There must be many men with rifles."

"I thought that too, Jim," the Major replied. "But now I think it is only one man who fires—and not with a rifle. He has a machine-gun."

Yet later he called a halt that they could listen more carefully to another burst of firing. He, Jim and the Ranger's men were puzzled.

"Come!" he ordered sharply. "We waste time. We will get the answer to the mystery when we reach the place where the shooting is."

They hurried on.

At sunrise they were met by Hart's deserting carriers who carried Austen in a litter they had contrived.

The Major expertly examined the Ranger's wound which the gun-bearer had dressed not unskilfully. The bullet had passed through Austen's body, fortunately missing any vital organ. The wound was a clean one and, as far as the Major could judge, Austen's recovery was simply a matter of time and rest. But at the moment the youngster was running a high temperature and was incapable of making any coherent statement.

The gun-bearer however gave the Major a full report of all that had happened—from the start of Hart's expedition to the Reserve to the time of the Ranger's arrival and their desertion.

"And when the full darkness fell, *inkosi*" he concluded, "I, with two others, crept to the side of the Ranger and carried him away. When we had come to a safe place we lighted a fire and tended his wound as best we could. He spoke to us then as a sane man speaks. He ordered us to carry him to meet his own men so that he could warn them of the evil which was

loose in the bush. Then he said—then the fever madness took him again. And as he ordered—so we have done. There is no blame to us, *inkosi?"*

"None," the Major said, "only praise. And this white man—Hart is his name, you say?—he is alone."

"Yes, *inkosi."*

"At what does he fire?"

"Who knows, *inkosi?* But I think his fears have driven him a little mad—his fears and the *puza* he has drunk."

"He was always mad," one of the carriers exclaimed. "He beat us without cause. He killed my brother and laughed as he killed him."

The Major turned to Austen's men.

"You will take your young *inkosi* to his quarters," he said. And he gave them explicit instructions as to how Austen was to be cared for.

To Hart's carriers he said:

"You will go with them and stay with them until I come—or until some other white *inkosi* comes. Your voices will be needed to give the truth of this affair. But have no fear. Reward, not punishment, will be your lot."

"And you, *inkosi?* What do you do?" one of the Ranger's men asked.

"I go to take a white man's justice to a white man who has defied that justice and defiled this sanctuary."

"At least permit some of us to go with you, *inkosi?"*

The Major shook his head.

"This is my *indaba,"* he said. "You have your orders. Obey."

"Yes, *inkosi,"* they said meekly.

The Major would have sent Jim with them, for he wished to deal with the ivory poacher alone.

"It is my *indaba,* Jim," he said. "I should have known better than to judge the young *inkosi* to be either a fool or a rogue.

"And so I let him go to meet evil, alone, unwarned. And all that has happened since is my blame. Therefore, I myself, must wipe out the fault. Go with the others. It is an order."

But for once Jim flatly refused to obey his Baas.

"Wo-we!" he exclaimed. "Your fault is my fault. Together we erred. Together we will make amends. Hear reason, Baas; if this man were only evil, I would still want to go with you though perhaps, if you said 'No' I would obey. But he is also mad, Baas. That is evident. So I go with you. Yes—" he continued when the Major shook his head. "Listen, only wounded a buffalo. That you did not kill him with your first shot was your fault. But when you followed him into the long grass, did you deny my right to come with you? You know you did not, Baas. And I tell you that this mad and evil white man is as dangerous as was that wounded buffalo. Therefore—I come with you."

"Come then, Jim," the Major said impatiently.

Jim grinned his relief at the Major's capitulation and the two men set off at a good pace.

Their course through the bush was followed by one of the native carriers. He was an expert bushman and was careful to do nothing to betray his presence to the two men he followed. He carried a broad-bladed stabbing spear.

His name was Dualla.

He was the brother of the man Hart had flogged to death.

AT ANY other time the Major would have enjoyed that trek in the cool early morning hours, for the Reserve was like a large, well-stocked zoo. They passed very close to herd of buck and the animals watched them unafraid. At any other time, too, their progress would have been checked and they would have admitted the wisdom of making a wide detour when they came to a herd of elephants feeding directly in their path. How big a herd it was they could not

judge, for the forest mammoths were half-hidden in the thick bush. But judging from the squealing of the calves and the thunderous intestinal rumblings the herd was a big one. Fortunately it was scattered over a wide front and, even more fortunate, the nerves of the herd leaders had not been shattered by the night's firing.

Having thought to the emergency of their errand the Major and Jim did not hesitate or consider the risk they were running, but continued their trek.

Their passage through the herd was without incident save that once Jim almost ran into the hind quarters of a big cow. They laughed at that memory when the herd was safely behind them, but there was more relief than mirth in their laughter. They knew that they had passed through a danger even greater than when they had encountered the lions.

"So we live, Baas," Jim observed, "to deal with the biggest game of all."

As they neared the high clump of trees crowning a slight rise which, the gun-bearer had told them, marked the ivory poacher's camp, their pace slackened and their senses were on the alert to detect any evidence of the unusual in the bush about them. It was at this time that Dualla was nearly discovered, but the Major and Jim decided that the movement in the bush which had attracted their attention only marked the passage of a bush pig. Dualla's imitation of that animal's grunt confirmed them in that belief.

At last they came within sight of Hart's camp.

It was deserted. Thin coils of blue smoke rose lazily into the air from the still smouldering fires. The packs were strewn about the place. The machine-gun was tilted crazily, aiming at the sky. But of Hart there was no sign.

"He has escaped us, Baas," Jim said. "He has fled to Portuguese country."

The Major looked up. He had been examining the machine-gun. The firing mechanism had jammed and apparently Hart had pounded it with boulders in a fit of petulant anger. At any rate, it was now useless.

"He has not escaped us, Jim," the Major said. "We follow him. Let us see if we can pick up his spoor."

As he spoke a rifle-shot sounded viciously and the Major pitched forward to the ground like a lifeless log. A second shot followed and Jim's despairing cry of "Baas!" was turned to a strangled cry as he too fell—almost on top of the Major.

"Are you hit, Jim?" the Major asked softly.

"No, Baas. The bullet whistled by my ear. And you, Baas?"

"I am unharmed, Jim. Now do not move. We must deceive him into thinking we are dead. Then, when he comes into the open, we will deal with him."

"If he comes to us—as you would go to a lion you had shot—with his rifle to his shoulder, I do not think we will live to deal with him."

THE Major chuckled softly.

"My rifle is in my hands, Jim. It is loaded. I have only to squeeze—"

"*Au-a.* I fell that way, too, Baas. But it is not going to be easy. We do not know in which direction he will come to us. No. We have been fools, Baas. He set a trap for us and we walked into it."

"Then we must get out of it, Jim. Certainly it is folly to stay here, without cover, waiting for him to end us when

he sees fit. On the other hand, it is folly to move if he is only waiting for us to show signs of life before firing again. Have you a play, Jim?"

"Perhaps, Baas. Listen; this is a man we hunt, a white man. What would you do if you were in his place and he in ours?"

"I think," the Major said slowly, "I would remember that I had no ammunition to waste—having fired so much during the night. And I would be proud of my shooting and be confident that my shots had not missed. But I would also be very cunning. I would move to another place in the bush, keeping a close watch on the two men I had shot. If they moved I would fire again. And I think I would wait a long time before I came out of the cover of the bush. Yes. And I would keep changing my position, fearing to be taken in the rear by surprise."

Jim grunted.

"And so I think he is acting, Baas. Now—it is evident that we cannot lie here, motionless, much longer. The sun rises swiftly. It will soon be very hot. The lack of water will be a torment and —and—" Jim's voice rose a little—"there are ants running across my body."

"Then we must move, Jim. And both at the same time. Swiftly. I will head for that bush to the right of us, you to the baobab tree. In a little while I will give the word. Make ready."

Both men tensed the muscles of their bodies, drawing up their legs a little and digging their toes into the ground. It was all done so slowly that no movement could be detected — at least, no shots broke the stillness to say they were detected.

"He may be playing with us, Jim?" the Major warned.

"He may, Baas. But he missed us once and, if his eyes have been fixed on us all this while, he will find it difficult to change the direction of his vision. Also —think of the *puza* he has been drinking. His hand will be unsteady, his eyes bleared. The suddenness of our move will surprise him. I think he will miss again."

"I hope that," the Major breathed fervently. "Are you ready, Jim?"

"Yes, Baas."

"Then—now."

The speed and precision with which both men got away from their prone position was wonderful proof of supple muscles coordinating with keen, alert minds. They shot forward like sprinters from their marks.

Jim ran directly behind his Baas instead of heading for the baobab tree. His hearing was more acute than the Major's and he had—just at the moment the Major had given word to run—detected a rustle in the bush directly behind them. So he now, in so far as he was able, protected the Major with his own body.

The comparative shelter of the bush was only twenty yards distant; the time required to cover that distance was a matter of two or three seconds, but in that time much could happen—a man can fire many shots.

Two shots sounded and bullets kicked up spurts of dust just to the right and left of the racing men. A third shot scarred the bark of a tree trunk on the edge of the clearing; the height of that scar was on a level with the Major's head.

A fourth shot was accompanied by a wild cry and a loud curse. A fifth shot instantly followed. It sounded strangely muffled. It was followed by a gasp—then silence.

BUT by this time the Major and Jim had reached the shelter of the bush and had found good cover behind a rock outcrop.

"What do you make of it, Jim?" the Major asked. "What is the meaning of the shout, and this silence?"

Jim scratched his head.

"I do not know, Baas. But we live. Now our position is better than that evil man's. Oh, at least, it is no worse. And I marked the place from which the shots came. He fired from the bush directly opposite where we now are."

The Major nodded.

"Then we will work our way to that place, encircling the clearing. You will go to the right, I to the left."

"Au-a, Baas!" Jim protested. "Is it wise that we separate?"

"It is an order, Jim," the Major said. "And this time see that you obey."

"Do I not always obey, Baas?" Jim asked innocently.

"You know I told you to run to the baobab tree. Instead, you took it upon yourself to run behind me, putting yourself between me and the rifle of the white man."

"Au-a," Jim chuckled. "I did not understand the Baas. I thought he was going to run to the baobab tree and—"

"That is enough," the Major laughed. "To other men you can lie—not to me. Now do not misunderstand this time. You go to the right. I go to the left. Good hunting, Jim."

"Good hunting, Baas. But wait, if I sight this game we hunt—do I shoot."

"No, Jim. Unless your life is in danger. The cry of the Go-a-way bird will bring me to you. If possible I want to capture this man—not kill him."

The Major's progress through the bush was swift and silent. For protection he relied on his keen eyes and hearing and by his ability to interpret the noises and movement in the bush about him. There was nothing else he could do. There was no point in gliding from tree to tree, for he had no assurance where his quarry now was. After the shooting Hart might have raced to another position in the bush; emulating the craftiest and most dangerous of all big game, the buffalo, he might even now be stalking the Major—or Jim. That was a question which would only be solved by locating the place from which he had fired and tracing the spoor from there.

With this knowledge ever present in his mind the Major pressed forward swiftly, trying not to think that at any moment a shot might be fired which he would not hear and which would send him crashing lifelessly to the ground.

He was almost tempted to turn in his tracks and hurry after Jim, putting an end to this unnatural hunt and leaving Hart to the justice of the sanctuary he had profaned.

But that thought, too, he put away from him. It was only by chance that Hart had not murdered the young Ranger. The intent to kill had been there. And Hart had committed other crimes. His punishment could not be left to chance.

At last the Major saw the body of a man sprawled on the ground in a lifeless heap. It was the native Dualla. A bullet had smashed its way into his brain. His right hand was clutched firmly about the haft of an assegai. The blade of the assegai was red with blood.

Jim quietly joined the Major.

"This is the answer to the riddle of the shout, and the silence, Jim," the Major said. "This one crept up on the white man unobserved. Three shots the white man fired then this one attacked him sending his fourth shot astray. His fifth shot—that did not go astray. This one died. I think he saved our lives, Jim."

"Perhaps, Baas," Jim agreed matter-of-factly. "But that is not what moved him. He disobeyed your orders to the carriers in order to be revenged on the man who killed his brother. And I think that in some part he was avenged. He wounded the white man before he died."

"But not badly, I think, Jim. Now, can you follow the white man's spoor?"

THAT proved a simple task and Jim led the way through the thick bush heading in the general direction along which they had trekked that morning.

Broken twigs, occasional spots of blood and trampled grass were the indications which guided him.

Having mind to the cunning of the man whose spoor they followed they did not relax their caution and exercised all their bush craft to avoid being taken by surprise.

"But I think there is no cause for that fear, Baas," Jim presently observed. "His first madness has passed and he now runs from the fear of punishment. His spoor runs straight."

At last they came to a large park-like space where the bush was very thin. Not far from the spot where the thick bush suddenly ended was a rock-bordered water hole and behind the rocks Hart waited.

He greeted their appearance with a curse and opened rapid fire. But his aim was erratic and they were able to get behind cover unharmed.

"Better surrender, Hart," the Major shouted.

The answer was a vicious curse and a bullet which crashed into the bush close to the tree which sheltered the Major.

The Major and Jim moved, searching for a place where they could cover Hart with their rifles.

But he had taken clever cover behind a circular barricade of rocks.

"Better climb a tree, Baas, and shoot from there."

The Major shook his head.

"I want to take him alive, Jim," he said soberly. "Death from a bullet is too easy a way out for him."

"Then what do we do?"

"Wait until darkness, Jim. Then we will rush him."

Jim groaned.

"*Au-a*, Baas. The hours will be long and I am hungry and thirsty. If you do not want his blood on your head, Baas, let me—"

"No, Jim," the Major said definitely. "We will wait."

The hours passed slowly.

At intervals the Major called to Hart, telling him to surrender, promising him a fair trial before a properly constituted court.

Each time Hart answered with curses and shots. Each time the Major and Jim were forced to change their position. Finally they climbed up into the branches of an enormous baobab tree and making themselves as comfortable as possible took turns in keeping watch on Hart; and while one watched the other slept.

It was during Jim's watch that Africa took a hand and Fate marched toward Hart with a slow, ponderous tread.

THE sun was dropping to its setting and shadows, deep and mysterious, advanced rapidly over the bush. They veiled the approach of death.

Jim watched the advance of the herd of elephants with a phlegmatic calm. Something had disturbed the beasts. This concerted movement of theirs was not a chance change of feeding grounds. They were in a compact mass, shoulder to shoulder. The bulls were in front, the cows and calves in the rear. As Jim watched, their pace increased.

While they were still some distance off, their approach unsuspected by Hart, the Major awoke.

"Run, Hart!" he shouted. "Run for this tree. The elephants are coming! They are stampeding and—"

As before shots and curses answered him.

"Run, you fool!" the Major shouted again.

A bull elephant trumpeted shrilly and Hart, now conscious of his danger, rose and with shouts of terror staggered toward the baobab tree with a limping gait.

"The carrier was revenged for his

brother's death," Jim said calmly. "That one will never reach the tree. His leg is wounded. And see—the elephants are moving fast!"

As he spoke Hart's leg crumpled under him and he fell heavily to the ground. He tried to rise but failed. He crawled along on hands and knees, appealing for help.

The Major slung his rifle over his shoulder and commenced to descend the tree, intending to go to Hart's assistance.

A blow on the head stunned him. He would have fallen, but Jim's left arm held him.

"The baas will have a headache and be very angry when he wakes up," Jim muttered as he hauled the Major back on to the branch and wedged him safely into a fork. "But if I had not struck—*wo-we!* He could not have saved the white man from the elephants; he could not have saved himself. So we would have all died."

And then Jim watched the oncoming tide of death. The ground shook to the elephants' stampede. He watched the herd pass over the crawling man, silencing his cries, flattening him into the ground.

They passed on, dividing at the baobab tree, uniting again once that obstacle was passed, racing on, flattening the bush, vanishing from sight. Behind them, laboring in its gait, its eyes glazed, foaming at the mouth, its jaws snapping viciously, ran a wild dog. It was mad.

At the foot of the tree it halted and its jaws slashed its own body.

Jim's rifle came to his shoulder.

"We owe you a debt, I and my Baas," he said, and fired.

The shot which ended the dog's agony brought the Major to consciousness.

"What happened, Jim?" he said slowly, putting his hand experimentally to his head.

"The Baas slipped as he was climbing down the tree," Jim said glibly. "He fell and knocked his head. *"Wo-we!* The elephants nearly got us both."

The Major looked at him grimly.

"Presently," he said, "I think I will remember what happened and then we will talk—you and I."

"Without doubt, Baas," Jim chuckled. "It is my reward that you are alive to talk and that you are not now trodden into the ground as is the poacher?"

"He is dead then, Jim?"

"The herd passed over him, Baas. He cried aloud once—but the cry was no more than the breath being crushed out of his body. It was not an easy death. He saw it coming. He heard it. Come and see for yourself, Baas."

The two men descended the tree.

"This was mad, too, Baas," Jim said indicating the dog he had shot. "He, too, loosed fear in the sanctuary. So he is dead. But first he served a good purpose. Maybe there will be a place for him in the hunting place of the spirits."

They covered the mangled remains of Hart with boulders, then retraced their steps and when they had done as much for the native they broke their fast, finding plenty of food at Hart's camp.

"What now, Baas?" Jim asked when their appetites were satisfied.

"We go to the Ranger's place, Jim."

"Now, Baas?" Jim asked incredulously. "Now that the sun is setting? *Wo-we!* We are both tired. Tomorrow morning we will trek."

"No. We start now. It may be that the young Ranger *inkosi* is in need of better care than his natives can give him. Besides, he will sleep better when he knows his animals are safe. And—" the Major continued sternly—"as we trek we will talk. I have just remembered that I did not fall from the tree. I was struck by one I trusted. For that there must be punishment."

"Au-a! My back is broad," Jim said with a grin. "And the Baas is always just."

Rule Hounds or Two-fisted Pile Drivers — Old Lady Pacific Loves a Good Fight

JETTY-WHACKER

By JOHN HAWKINS

BIG DAN McCARTHY was *construction,* Mister, the real, honest-to-God, bull-necked construction—from the calked soles of his number elevens to the bandless, grease-stained hat that topped his shaggy thatch.

That's right, *Big Dan* and he was big. The way the front end of a road engine is big, the way a ten-ton granite boulder is big. He had to duck to get through the office door, and the spread of his shoulders filled the opening from one side to the other.

And arms, roped with living steel, that were made for work, man's work. Hands like baby head blocks—and just as hard.

Sure, you get the picture, Mister, that's Big Dan McCarthy. One of the old ones, one of the forgotten breed of men. The breed of iron-throated, big-fisted drivers of men who built this country. Who pushed rail steel across its width; bridged its rivers and threw up towers to the sky. Man drivers these, tunnel-men, steel-men, sand-hogs and jetty-men.

Yes, Jetty-men, Mister. Big Dan built jetties. The contracts were awarded to the Great Western Construction Company, but his name was there. You'd find it down at the bottom in heavy script. Daniel J. McCarthy, Owner. Owner, now there's a weak-kneed word for you. Big Dan was more than that, he *was* the Great Western. He was the blood and breath of it, the flesh, the strength, the bone and the great hearted drive of it. All of it. And the Great Western, like the man who owned it, was big.

Mister, he did own it. Every nut and bolt, every spike and top maul. The panting Shay locomotives were his, the steam shovels, the cranes, and the special blue-water driving rigs. The jack hammers that gnawed the big boulders out of the belly of the granite mountain were his too. He owned them, and he had them marked; had the letters cut deep in the steel. Great Western? Hell no, that was just a name so the white collared guys would have something to put in their books, so they'd have something to put on the estimate checks. But the other things were different, they were his tools and he marked them that way. Just two letters—B. D. Right, Mister, they stood for Big Dan.

That's the kind of a man he was, and that's why it happened. Big Dan on one side, and against him a little guy. A half-pint who stood a bare five-foot-five in spring heels, and didn't weigh one-forty soaking wet. But that cold-eyed runt carried a hate that was bigger than he was. And he was only an inspector.

Big Dan against him, remember, that meant not only the man himself, but the outfit he'd built through twenty years of fighting. Last-ditch, no quarter battles that had run a leaky pile-driver barge and a reel of rusty cable up into the biggest jetty outfit in the country. An outfit that grabbed at the jobs other men wouldn't touch. Why. Mister, those are jobs where you make the big money—or lose your shirt. Sure, Big Dan had guessed wrong—the best contractors do—but he'd bulled the bad ones through someway, and he'd made the others pay.

That's right, Mister, there's real money in jetties when the prices are right, and the piling goes down fast. When the rock tonnage is moving the way it should. When there isn't a hitch from quarry to sea. The daily estimates run into figures that would stop your breath in your throat.

But—

The south jetty job was running that way; was purring like a mess-house cat, when Big Dan left it in his super's hands while he tried to stop the leaks on two of the other jobs. Two of the bad ones that were eating into his reserve almost as fast as the south jetty job piled it up.

He left the job running pretty. He'd been gone two days when the little guy came—and things went to hell.

Not the first shift. The little guy watched and asked a few questions. The wet-end crew gave him scant attention—for new inspectors come and go almost as often as the tide. They ignored him that day and built trestle—five bents in eight hours—and went home well satisfied.

The little guy had the blue-backed book of specifications that construction men called the *Bible* in his pocket when he went out with the shift the next day. He watched that day too, while his eyes got cold, and then he went to work.

THE crane man had just lowered the hook over a timber cap, was ready to place it on a row of freshly cut piling

when Shorty clambered into the cab.

He shook his head. "School's out," he said, "you can shut 'er down."

The crane man thought he knew a joke when he heard one so he nodded and grinned and picked up the book.

"I said shut 'er down." Shorty's eyes were as cold as an October sea, his voice bleak and raw. "Put that cap on and you'll have to tear it out and rebuild. I'm rejecting it."

"Huh—?"

"It's rotten."

"But we've been using that—"

"You have been using bad timber, I watched you yesterday, but not anymore. They meet the standards or they don't go in. While we're at it, there isn't a good stringer, or cap or brace on the material car. You're through for the day."

The foreman was there, too, by that time. He listened, but he didn't argue. His job was building trestle not jawing with the Inspector. He climbed off the rig and walked back along the track to the phone. He was grinning when he came back.

"Thorndike'll be out," he said.

Shorty nodded.

The crew lined up on the lee side of the driver rig and waited. The foreman joined them there, got his back to the wall and his pipe going. Why should he sweat over this nutty inspector? Thorndike was the super, let him fix it. He would too. He'd talk this inspector dizzy, and when he got through the inspector's ears'd be ringing like a Chinese gong. And the crew would be working again.

Delays are money in jetty work. No, Mister, they don't put time clauses in jetty contracts. They don't have to. Those things are for highway, or dam, or bridge jobs far back in the shelter of land. Here, they have a better way.

The contract reads simple, so much trestle, so much rock to be placed this year. Then, in italics, one other line. *"Work must be completed as contracted, and no payment will be made for trestle replacement after the working season of the year."* All? Right, Mister, and that nice formal line carries the punch that's knocked more than one contractor right out of the business.

You've seen jetties. Possibly from the deck of a cruise steamer when it came down the river and went out to sea. Maybe from the beach, you've stared out at that line of rock that parallels the river channel and runs far out to sea. You knew why it was there. Knew that without it ships couldn't get over the bar in rough weather; knew that without it the big blue water vessels couldn't come in at all. And maybe you wondered, for a minute, how the job was done.

They build trestle first—the same kind of simple trestle the railroads use to bridge mountain canyons. And they brace it with rock as they go. Big rock. Huge chunks of granite that weigh six or eight or ten tons each. A single slab that size is a flat-car load. There's little stuff too, to fill the voids, but it's the big ones that count. The giants that interlock against the thunderous power of the sea.

Simple, sure it's simple. Build trestle and dump rock, but this isn't a mill pond. This, Mister, is the Pacific, and the wet end is five long miles from shore.

THE working season ends in late September. She rolls a storm across the river mouth and goes to work. Her season then, her job, and she does it up brown.

Rail steel, ties, stringers, pilings and caps vanish utterly. She picks the jetty up by the slack of the pants and shakes it; shakes it till the steel clatters and the insides fall out. Oh, she's a playful wench who ties seventy-pound track in knots, tosses jetty timber around like straws.

You see it now? When spring comes again the contractor goes down in his pants for dough. Digs deep, and lays it on the line for timber, for ties, for rail. He rebuilds, while his bank account melts and the money lenders take over. Rebuilds miles of track to get out to the pay quantity again. But the black figures never match the red ones in the ledger—not by half.

That's why Big Dan's crew were leaning on it, why the drive behind them never let up. Not even when their tails were hitting the floor and their tongues hanging out. Work, Mister, those fur-chested jetty-whackers could work and they did, while death looked over their shoulder. The production figures went up and up, but the foreman always said the same thing when the shift ended: "Didn't do much today, but we'll give 'er hell tomorrow."

And that, Mister, is why Thorndike was raving when he hit the working deck on the wet end and found the bull-necks squatting on their tails out of the breeze. Squatting, so-help-me, because a dollar-a-dozen inspector had shut the job down. Had called the timber bad and shut down. With rock trains piling up in the yard, with half a mile of trestle to be built before winter chased them out, with——

Thorndike landed roaring. He bellowed and shouted and raved. And the Inspector listened. He inclined his head slightly, that's all, and stood there on wide-spread feet with his thumbs hooked in his belt. His face was as gray, as cold, as hard as a slab of granite. He listened till he'd heard enough, and then he stopped Thorndike with a short gesture and a barked:

"Shut up."

Thorndike's jaw sagged, and his eyes got big. He said, "Just who in the—"

"Here," Shorty reached back and hauled the blue-bound book out of his pocket. "Did you ever see one of these?"

Thorndike growled, "Yes, but what—"

"Read it." The Inspector told him, "Read it, you'll find the specifications for material in there, on page thirty-eight. Then tell me how you expect to use this junk and get away with it."

Thorndike didn't say anything for a minute. The lumber was bad. He knew it, but so did the engineer-in-charge. The engineer knew also the reason for its being under standard.

Thorndike touched the Inspector's arm, led him out of the wind. "Look, you haven't been here very long, and you don't know the set-up."

LITTLE bunches of muscle worked along the Inspector's jaw. "Go on."

"We put good stuff in this trestle, the best money could buy, till this strike shut down the mills. That put us over a barrel. We're payin' more for this scrap than we paid for good material. We had to lease a dinky mill, and give the crew double pay to get it out. We know it isn't tops, but it is timber and it will do the work. It's plenty good enough to last until the storms run us out." He frowned. "Now look, if we built this last half mile with steel and sunk the footings in concrete—it couldn't be done that way, but suppose it could — you know that the whole damn thing would be gone in the spring. Right?"

The Inspector said, "Yes."

"Then that's the difference? We're doin' the best we can. It'll do the work, and let us get the rock in, so we—" Thorndike thought he'd sold him, thought the war was over. Hell, this guy was all right, so he could see past the end of his nose. And then, when his mouth was opening to order the crew back to work, the inspector dropped the roof on him.

"Me, I don't care." The Inspector slapped his leg with the book while he talked. "You could build this jetty out of tumble weed and cotton—if the spec's called for that. You bid on this job, you got the contract, an' she's yours to build." His voice got raw then, and he flipped the book open. "Just the way this says it's to be built. And that's the way you'll do it. Every batter-block, cable, every brace, cap stringer and brace pin. You knew all the conditions before you started. I can't tell you what to do or how to do it. And where you get your material is none of my business. But I can stop you if you don't do it right."

"Then you're trying to shut us down because—"

"I have shut you down." The green-flecked eyes never left Thorndike's face. "You'll stay down till you get your material up to standard."

You can't argue with a man like that, Mister, not when he throws his words out in an icy, flat voice. No use trying. Thorndike did the only thing left for him to do.

"Let's go in and see Baldy."

"Okay." The Inspector spun around and started back over the material car to the speeder. Thorndike stayed long enough to tell the foreman. "Wrap her up, Mike, that's all for today."

Neither man had anything to say on the ride in. The Inspector because he'd done his talking, and Thorndike because he was waiting, silently rehearsing the arguments he was going to use on Baldy Brown, engineer-in-charge.

That was a battle, Mister, a battle that shook the office windows. Not fists, a contractor doesn't swing on an engineer, not if he's smart. And Thorndike was smart; Big Dan doesn't hire the other kind of men. He knew his way around, knew the angles, the answers and all the words. This was no new thing. Contractors and inspectors have been locking horns since the day they built the pyramids, and they will be till the last boat spike is driven.

But it was a battle. None of your smooth-tongued big-worded debates, but a three-cornered, wild-eyed argument that lasted for hours.

Baldy Brown shouted till his gray hair stood straight up; shouted till the cords in his neck threatened to split his shiny collar wide open. Then he sat back in the worn swivel chair and mangled a five-cent cigar while Thorndike hammered the desk and roared till the roof rocked.

And the Inspector said, "No."

Baldy finally stamped over to the faucet and got himself a drink of water. Then he cleared his throat and said, "That's it, Thorn, I can't do anything. He's right, the spec's say so, but so are you. There's the specifications on one side and horse-sense on the other. But in a showdown the specifications will stick."

"But, Baldy, you ain't goin' to let an Inspector walk all over you?"

"An Inspector wouldn't." Baldy rubbed his nose and stared sourly at the half-pint slouched in the chair. "But this god-given son is a Junior Engineer. One of the fancy-pants straight from Washington that the department is grooming for the big jobs. They send 'em around to do all kinds of work, and get in our hair, and then they push them up. They carry a lot of weight with the brass hats, Thorn."

"But—"

"I could go to bat for you, but I won't. The guy's got everything on his side and when the shouting was over you'd find my hide on the barn-door. I'm getting old, and I'll retire pretty soon. You're both right, but the kid's got all the dynamite. I'll pass—"

The Inspector didn't move, nor did his expression change. "Do you wish to put that in writing, sir?"

Baldy exploded, "No, but I did get it off my chest, and you can try and prove that I said it. You're young, that's the big fault, and you think the specifications are the ten commandments. Sooner or

later you'll find that the head-office sometimes turns a fool loose on those."

DEAD pallor crept up the Inspector's face. "I wrote those, sir."

Baldy whistled. "That's it, Thorn. I can't do a thing for you. Go over my head, but it won't do any good. The armchair engineers'll back him up. You're asking permission to put rotten material in a government job. Asking for official permission to short-change the job, to do sloppy work."

Thorndike swore then and slammed his hat on the back of his head. "Maybe I can't do anything, but Big Dan can. And he will, if he has to tear this job out by the roots and take it clear to Washington." He wheeled and his calks ripped a hand-sized bright place out of the floor.

Baldy fussed with a pencil after Thorndike had gone. He didn't look at the Inspector. "You went hunting for grief, boy, and you found it. I was in charge here, and you went over my head. I don't care about that, but I've got my own skin to look after, and I need my pension. You are, starting right now, in charge of the trestle construction. You asked for this, and you're getting it. It's your neck, get jammed up and I'll throw you overboard so hard you'll bounce for a week." Then he too jammed his hat on and went away from there.

The shift went out on time the next morning, and the material car was loaded with good lumber. Top, triple-A, number one material. And back in the contractor's office Thorndike slept with his feet on the desk, and his big body deep in a barrel chair. There were fatigue lines around his mouth and his eyes looked as if they'd been rimmed with soot.

He'd spent twelve hours getting that material. Twelve hours of frantic telephoning, of searching lumber yard stock piles, of routing out trucks and men. The stringers came from one place, the ties from another and the caps from three different places. He cleaned the lumber yards for fifty miles to get it, and it cost him plenty. Twelve strident hours added on to the eighteen-hour shift that had gone before. But he got it into the yards and had it cut, framed and loaded. It was ready when the early shift went on.

Thorndike didn't go to bed. Not when hell was on the loose and the production schedule kicked wide open. He slept with his clothes on while the shift took his good lumber out to sea. The wet end boss had his orders, and he knew his job. They had a full day's run to make up, and material enough for two days' work.

THEY worked that day, the bull-necks, the top hands, the crane and driver men. Worked while greasy clouds raced along the horizon, and the bearded swells climbed high on the jetty rock to dump tons of green water through the ties. Worked while their hands numbed and the wind-driven spray stung like shot.

And they built trestle, Mister. Slammed it in at top speed with every man doing his job and no more. But doing it fast and well. Bull-job. The piling went down, the caps and stringers were placed. Clean fir ties next, and then the rails, spiked in place by fast-swinging top mauls. The track crept out to sea and the cold-eyed Inspector could find no flaw in the work. Yes, they worked like only an old, smart

crew can work. And Old Mother Pacific made it tough.

She chilled them with a rising wind, and soaked them with salt spray. She hazed over the muddy sun, and left it

bleak and cold. She hung a curtain of mist along the beach and cut off the sight of land. They were alone out there on the working deck; on a tiny, man-made thing in a world of wind and water.

But that was their dish, Mister, it was right down their alley. One or two of them put on tin coats, and the rest just swore and kept going. They were gaining too, creeping over that sag in the production schedule.

And then the old man with the scythe stepped into the picture.

Maybe it was the cold that stiffened Frenchy's hands when he climbed up on top of the material car. Maybe the pressure, or the yell for speed, that made him careless when he dropped the sling loop over the crane hook and waved the load away.

He was bending over then, starting to clamber down the ladder, when the craneman picked up the load. He picked it up fast, the cable jerked taut, and the awkward load moved in the sling. Then, off-balance, it swung.

Someone yelled. The sudden sound brought Frenchy's head around to see the load sweeping toward him. A ragged second while he crouched there. He couldn't flatten under the load, there wasn't room, and he couldn't get down the ladder in time. If he could catch the cable he might hang there, but if he missed he'd be flicked into the sea like you brush a crumb from the table. The crane man was clawing at the controls and cursing when Frenchy jumped.

Jumped, from the top of the material car at the board-and-cable walk that hangs on the side of the crane cab, that leads past it to the working deck. He shot out and won through fifteen feet of space. But the crane cab was still moving, swinging, and the walk was moving too. Frenchy yelled then, yelled as his booted feet smashed through the two-by-four guard rail and he tried to throw his weight inboard to safety. He tried, teetering there on the walk-edge, while his flailing arms clawed for balance and caught only the spray-loaded wind.

He screamed and they let him go. Arching backwards, etched sharply against the green of the hissing swell that licked up to meet him. After that only a wrist and hand above the water. A rigger had reached the coiled line, had heaved it while bleak curses spilled from his lips. Then nothing—nothing but the sound of the ebb that sucked and snarled around the piling and the wind borne squawk of a gull.

The rigger silently recoiled the line. The foreman spoke first in a queer, strained voice. "He never learned to swim, and it's just as well maybe. He wouldn'ta had a chance anyway. Wrap her up, we're goin' in."

They stowed the gear away, and sent the big rig scuttling shoreward as fast as the traveling gears would take it. And—just halfway there — they met Big Dan McCarthy.

HE LEFT the speeder and came over to the material car. His big shoulders were hunched and his eyes weary. He hadn't stopped to change clothes, but had come straight to the center of the trouble.

The foreman said, "We lost Frenchy."

He didn't have to say that. The only information Big Dan lacked was the name. He'd seen it before, too many times, seen other grim-mouthed crews come in. And he knew that once off the wet-end it's thumbs down. Life-belts—even if the men would wear them—wouldn't help. For long before the coast guard could get out there a corpse would be riding the cork. The sea needs but to smash that body once against the jetty rock and it's all over.

They'd find him, Mister, three days later. The sand would be pounded into the flesh and it wouldn't be pretty. It isn't —not when the birds get there first.

Big Dan listened while the foreman told him how it had happened. His big hands knotted into square fists, and his mouth worked. His voice was oddly low.

"You can go straight to the shops, Mike, the rock train's out of the way. We'll try it again, tomorrow." He started away, then turned to ask, "Where's that new Inspector? I want to talk to him."

"He's sittin' back of the crane cab."

"Tell him I'd like to have him ride in with me."

Big Dan went back the way he'd come and the foreman delivered his message. The Inspector stared up at him with bitter eyes, and pushed flat words through a tight grin.

"Why not? It has to come."

The foreman didn't get it then, but he realized the words later, and how the Inspector seemed to be talking to himself.

He left, and the bull-necks watched him walk the track to the speeder. They waited for the explosion, for Big Dan to eat this little guy—hair, hide, bones and all.

Big Dan was ready too. Looking the other way, waiting with his breath sucked in. He would turn, as he always did, and the first roar would lift the Inspector right out of his shoes.

It's half of any fight to get the jump.

He came around at the sound of calks snicking into wood. Came around and the breath whooshed out of him, and his jaw dropped open. He pawed the air, said:

"You!"

The Inspector didn't speak. Thorndike, on the seat beside his boss, noticed for the first time that both these men had the same wide mouths, the same deep-socketed eyes, the same jutting chins.

The silence thickened. Big Dan stared dumbly and his lips worked words that wouldn't come. Then, and it was no roar, Mister, but a low-voiced question. "You, Dan, where'd you come from? How—"

But he didn't hear the answer. He wasn't listening but sitting stiffly, staring with the glazed eyes of a man who had taken an unexpected pile-driver blow over the heart.

The Inspector was Big Dan's son.

WAIT a minute, Mister, you have to go back to understand. Back the way Big Dan's mind wheeled back across the years to a room coldly stiff with heavy, dark furniture. To the white-faced boy who hurled burning words across the table.

Big Dan had tried to explain then. Had tried to tell this proud-mouthed boy that the accident had been beyond his control. But he had little skill with the softer words, the kind that tell how you feel when all the laughter in your life is snatched away, and all that's left is a gnawing ache. He had tried, with the words he knew and failed. And he had winced at the cold hatred in his son's voice.

"You killed my mother. You took her up to that camp, when you knew that she couldn't stand the altitude. And when she needed a doctor you sent her out with one of your drivers. You couldn't take the time yourself. No, you left it to a drunken rough-neck, and he went off the road."

Big Dan had tried again, then, with clumsy, choked-up phrases. Tried and failed, when his thinly leashed temper got away. This cold-eyed, shouting son would never learn from him that his mother had come to the mountain camp against his wish and without his knowledge. That he'd sent her back with the best driver in camp. And then, after the accident, had gone down into the canyon on a rope to bring up the horribly broken thing that had been his wife.

His rising flood of rage had been matched by the anger that burned in his son's words. "You didn't even wire me so I could come to the funeral—"

Big Dan had stopped the words that had burned in his throat. How could he

tell young Dan that he'd wanted him to remember his mother as he'd seen her last. A beautiful woman whose hair was raven dark, almost blue, and shot through with glinting lights. With laughter on her lips and a husky gladness in her voice. A real picture. The kind for a man to carry through the years; to lock in his brain and keep fresh and new. Not marred, as Big Dan's was, by the memory of a sealed casket, of a poor, smashed bit of clay. No, he hadn't tried to tell him, for all the good words were gone by then.

He'd watched the boy slam out of the house with a bitter, "To hell with you, I'll get along without you and your money." A last glimpse of the set white face, and the boy had whipped the door shut and walked out. Out of Big Dan's life from that day till this.

And now it was happening again. Their anger rising like oil-fed fire. Rising to show in their eyes and in the stiff set of their jaws while the silence stretched thin.

Thorndike was wondering then, the way you are, Mister, how the kid could have been there without anyone tumbling to his identity. Simple enough. The engineer's time-keeper had his name and so did Baldy Brown, but no one else had ever heard it. The bull-necks didn't care. He was *"the Inspector"* like the man who had preceded him had been, like the man who followed him would be. Just a guy with a pencil. And if they had known his name it wouldn't have meant anything. The payrolls are full of McCarthys.

BIG DAN spoke first, "So you're doing the same thing yet? Jumping at things. Telling older men, better men, things they knew when you were in three-cornered pants. A slide-rule and a sheepskin made a wizard out of you. A pig-headed know-it-all." The wrong words, sure, but it was his anger talking.

The Inspector pushed his face up close to Big Dan's. "Still the bull-driver. Still yelling, still trying to scare men into working. Still trying to pull fast ones. It won't work here. The party's over, only grade-A material goes into this jetty—"

"Any kick about today's lumber?" Big Dan's eyes glinted.

"No."

"Then listen. An inspector, even when he is a wet-nosed Junior Engineer, can do just one thing. Get that? You can't tell us what to do, or how to do it, or where to get our material. You can reject work or material that's below standard, but that is all. Remember it, and the rest of the time keep your mouth shut."

The Inspector didn't say anything, Mister, but his eyes went cold again and his face was stiff and hard. He'd asked for this, he'd walked in with his chin out, and collected.

That was the beginning, the real start of the war. Big Dan, all his outfit, all the experience of his years of fighting on one side, and on the other—just a little guy. The little, bleak-eyed, bitter-mouthed Inspector whose name was also Dan McCarthy. One small man, but he had an ally. Old Lady Pacific.

She took a hand then and rolled up a seven-hundred-dollar storm. Just a little storm, Mister, not a real hell-for-breakfast, middle-of-the-winter job. Not the kind that flattens the summer shacks, and sends the pounding surf far inshore to smash the windows out of the summer hotel. Just a baby storm.

A baby storm, a kind of preview of what Old Lady Pacific had in the bag. The morning shift was an hour old, and the first rock train was creeping into dumping position when the storm broke.

The wet end crew didn't stop work, not right away. They had a row—a bent to you, Mister—of freshly driven piling all trimmed to the proper height so they put the cap on and anchored the stringers in place. The Inspector was there, rough out on the timber with his body slanted into the wind, and not in the shelter of the crane house where the pencil man

should be. There was something—some bit of work—that he didn't like, so he pushed his spray-wet face close to Little Blue's ear and told him so.

Little Blue came around snarling. He was an old one, this Blue, and he'd eaten salt for years. The raw, chill wind hadn't helped his temper, and the Inspector was more than he could take. He crouched there, with his calks set deep in the timber, and he told young Dan a thing or three. Told that he'd built more jetties

on his day's off than the brass-bound Inspector had seen in his life. That he'd cut his teeth on a top maul, and that if all the drift pins he'd driven were piled up on the working deck he'd bend them over the Inspector's head. He told him plenty, while the wind mounted, and the rest of the crew stopped to listen.

The Inspector's face was a flinty gray, his jaw muscles working, but he listened quietly.

Little Blue finished by trying to push the top-maul into the Inspector's hands. "Here, guy, do it yourself."

The Inspector shook his head. "Change it or get off the job. I can run you off and make it stick. The contract says so. Anytime you want to step around in back of the office after shift I'll be there, but out here you'll do your job—right. Change that, or I'll reject the whole bent."

Little Blue glared, and spat into the smoking swell that climbed high on the piling. "See that? The seas are runnin' higher. We'll have to quit pretty soon and when we come back this bent she's gone. Maybe others, but this one sure. What's the difference?"

The Inspector didn't answer. He stood there stiff-faced and unyielding while Little Blue did the job over. The wet end boss shut the job down then, and the crew stowed the gear away. There was little said, but the foreman was beginning to get the answer.

He was an old timer too, and he'd seen them come and go. Engineers and inspectors, fresh-faced kids with the ink still wet on their diplomas. Long on theory, but short on horse-sense. Rule-hounds. Men who swore by the spec's, who lived them, ate, slept and breathed them. The Inspector was one of these.

The crew hunched out of the wind as the driver rig crawled shoreward. There was no laughter among them, no booming jests, but only a little muttered talk and grim-faced nods. And when the bull-necks are quiet, Mister, there you've got trouble in the making.

Bent number 1584 is four and a half miles from the beach, and from that point out—seaward—the track is double. It branches there, spreading in a Y, and the two trestles parallel each other thirty feet apart. They need that area, need it to make a wider, stronger jetty out there where it has to take the full fury of Old Lady Pacific.

The driver was on the south track that morning, and they could only go to the point where the tracks joined, for the rock train barred the way.

Right, Mister, the rock train. The old man with the scythe liked that crew. He's always there—and sometimes he reaches out to touch a shoulder. But mostly he watches. And it is something to watch when the stubby Shay—the slow, tiny locomotive with hell's own power—slams a string of loaded flat cars into position and the baby shovel goes to work.

They waited there, watching the big ones thunder into the sea, while the wind came up and Old Lady Pacific growled a warning. Waited, and the bull-necks had a chance to talk. Little Blue started it

with his wild-eyed crack. He said the Inspector was responsible for Frenchy's death. Hay-wire, sure, but it was something to talk about. He blamed the shutdown on the Inspector. Thus, the Inspector was responsible for the rush that followed it, and for Frenchy's death.

Little Blue didn't believe it himself—not at first. But other men grabbed at his words. A dozen tongues worked and the idea was polished, expanded. By the time they were coupled onto the empty rock train and rolling shoreward it was gospel.

OLD LADY PACIFIC owned the jetty for the next three days. Took it over, buried the track in a welter of churning water. She was busy, too, with her seven-hundred-dollar storm. The fourth day they checked the damage. Three hundred feet of track gone, eight bents on the sea end plucked out by the roots and a quarter of a mile of pipe snatched from between the rails.

Big Dan didn't waste time while the Old Lady was tearing his jetty apart. He was on the move night and day, scouring lumber yards, fifty, a hundred, two hundred miles away. The big trucks followed him, came roaring back to the supply piles with timber. When the storm was over they had material enough to run two weeks.

They rebuilt, Mister, rebuilt while the tag end of the storm threw icy spray at them, while Big Dan turned on the pressure, while the rock trains piled up in the yard and the working season melted away.

That pressure was designed for the Inspector, thrown at him just as fast as Big Dan's crews could dish it out. Smart pressure, that got the Inspector out of bed in the middle of the night to find a foreman on his doorstep. "Pardon me, sir, but could you explain a paragraph in the spec's to me. It's a little vague, and I've got to know before the shift goes out." Hours under hot lights explaining tower braces and dapped guard-rail to men who knew those things before he was born. Little or no sleep, and long shifts. Answering a thousand questions a day. Silly questions that took up his time and kept him away from his reports. And those took other hours out of an already crowded day.

Sure he knew what they were doing, Mister, and he knew there was nothing he could do about it. They were wearing him down, taking all his time with a thousand petty details. Throwing pressure at him, exhausting him, getting the set-up ready. Then——

He'd be punchy when the questions came, just one question among a thousand others, but there'd be men close to hear his answer, or maybe he'd scrawl his initials on an order. And that would be it.

It's an old gag. Big Dan had used it before. The Inspector would wake up to find that he'd signed a work order for ten thousand gallons of paint to paint the jetty blue, or ordered five miles of picket fence for a walk out to the jetty end. And what Big Dan could do with that. The wires to Washington would hum. A certain frock-coated dignitary would drop a sheaf of papers on the Department-head's desk. And young Dan McCarthy would be hunting another payroll to attach his name to.

The department couldn't do anything else. Mister, think how that order would look on the front page national dailies. Junior Engineers are cheaper than bad publicity. Even good Junior Engineers.

Those days put a strain around his mouth, put a leanness in his face, and took his eyes far back into his head. Kept them burning and bloodshot.

During those weeks he talked to Big Dan only once. He was walking on his heels then, dead for sleep, when he met Big Dan crossing the yards.

He stopped him with, "Wait a minute."

Big Dan looked at him, said, "Yes?"

The Inspector didn't speak for a moment. He stood there frowning, blinking heavy eyes. The thing he'd had to say

had slipped away from his work-weary mind. Then he remembered.

"One of the office men lives up near Winepa, that's forty miles from here. He said he had a letter this morning and that the mill up there is running again. You could pick up the stuff you need for the jetty, they've got a spur track that runs up to the mill. Might save time and money." The Inspector wheeled around and started away.

Big Dan stared then, stared while his ideas crumbled, and, for a second, the wall between them was gone. He caught the smaller man in lunging strides, touched his arm, asked:

"Why did you tell *me* that?"

"My job, Mister. I'm here to build the best jetty possible, to see that it's built according to specifications. You can use that lumber—that's all."

"Then—" Big Dan's voice was almost gentle.

"Oh, I get it." Bright anger drove the sleep from the Inspector's eyes. "You think the job's going soft for you. Get over that idea." His face was set again, and the same bitterness roughed his words. "You think I'm a fool for detail. I am. Every bolt, every spike, every brace and batter cap are part of that jetty. Start sluffing on the little things, and then the big ones go to hell. As long as I'm on construction you can depend on one thing. This job'll be done right."

That tore it. The wall was there, again, and burning rage added fresh height. Big Dan started to speak, but the Inspector's voice went on.

"What's between us is different. You're my father, but you'll never hear me brag about that. I told you what I thought years ago and I haven't changed my mind."

Big Dan choked then, spluttered over a harsh curse. The Inspector walked away. Big Dan shoved his hands deep in his pockets and stared after his retreating back. A grudging admiration crept into his mind. The boy was a fighter. He was standing on his own two legs, asking no favors and taking it just as it came. Big Dan had battle scars, Mister, plenty of them and he had to admire a fighter.

THORNDIKE was waiting when Big Dan came into the time office. He grinned, and poked a piece of paper at his boss.

"Here it is. Shorty got it last night. He went over and wanted a work order for extra cable. The kid signed the slip without seeing it was blank. You can throw the book at him."

Big Dan frowned. He took the sheet out of Thorndike's hand and stared at it a long time without speaking. Then he said, "The mill at Winepa's open and running again. I guess we won't need this." He kicked open the stove door and laid the order on the roaring flame.

Thorndike didn't get it. "But he'll—"

"We can get lumber now." Big Dan's voice was slow, "For the rest all he wants is a good job. Give it to him."

He couldn't say the rest, he couldn't tell this case-hardened Super of his that it wouldn't have made a dime's worth of difference if the mill hadn't been running. That he would still have burned the paper.

Three days then while things ran silk-smooth. Old Lady Pacific lay flat under an easy wind. The piling went down fast and the track steel moved out. The train crews cleaned the yards, spilled plenty of tonnage into the sea. The strain seemed to be gone and the whole job was purring again. Twice, the wet-end boss came over to talk to the Inspector. Small talk, about the weather, the work, and once he showed him a snapshot of his family.

Three days of sweet going, Mister, and the fourth day the old man with the scythe stalked the length of the working deck and touched Little Blue's shoulder.

They weren't working the wet-end that morning, but had stopped just past the throat of the Y, where the track went

double, for a repair job. One of the big boulders had bounced, in the unloading the day before, had caromed off another rock and smashed piling to matchwood.

The repair job was almost done, the new sticks were in and cut, when it happened. An electric drill did it, Mister, a high-speed drill, the kind that sinks inch-and-a-half holes in timber. They're heavy, those drills, a man needs both hands to heave one around.

Little Blue had the drill, had it resting, point down, on the outer edge of a tie while he talked to the man below. He was leaning over, his weight on the handles, laughing. He was leaning that way when the drill started. Started, Mister, while the drill went skittering off at an angle and the drill bucked and jerked in his hands.

Already leaning too far out, he never had a chance. He swore suddenly, tried

to drop the drill and pull back, while one hand pawed the air and his calks jerked loose. The man below ducked back under the trestle, and two of the crew above leaped to grab him.

He fell. Not far, Mister, just twenty-six feet, but it seemed to take forever. He turned over once in the air—still trying to get free of the drill—and landed on his hands and knees on a great slab of granite. He screamed, just once, and the sound cut through the welter of sudden shouts on the working deck.

Twenty-six feet. Plenty, when you fall as he did. Plenty to smash your knee-caps to jelly; to leave you white and limp on the rock with one arm doubled oddly.

The talk didn't start until they reached the shops with Little Blue. They put him on a speeder there, and as its engine sound died their voices rose. There were almost as many versions as there were men. But they all agreed on one thing. It was the Inspector's fault!

The drill had not been connected, had been just so much cold steel, until the Inspector plugged it in. The wet-end boss listened. Then he pivoted around and stalked over to the Inspector who was leaning against the shop.

"Did you connect that drill?"

The Inspector's face was gray, Mister, but it was a different kind of gray. The sureness was gone, and his eyes were dull.

He said, "Yes, I did."

The wet-end boss cursed him. Harsh, thick curses that used all the words men fight about. The Inspector's nostrils flared, but he took it. Tried to explain.

"I was going past there. I saw the plug was out and I thought maybe I'd stepped on the cord and pulled it loose. So I—I put it back."

"Yes, and you put a good man in the hospital. A better man than you'll ever be. His knee-caps are broken, so's his arm and God knows what else. He—"

"I know, he might never walk again."

The crew were around them then. Hard-eyed, sullen men who were remembering the previous accident. How Frenchy had died, how Little Blue had said—— No doubt this time.

The wet-end boss' voice was ragged. "He'll never work on another jetty. And neither will you—not this one, anyway. If you go out, this crew stays in." He pushed through the men to the phone.

Big Dan was up at Winepa arranging delivery for his material, so Thorndike took the message as it came from the shops at Sand. He had a car and a doctor waiting when the speeder arrived. He waited only long enough to see Little Blue on his way to the hospital before he crossed the yards to the engineer's office.

The same three men, Mister, only there

was no argument this time. Just Thorndike shouting. Baldy Brown was quiet in his swivel chair and the Inspector listened from the typing desk.

"He poked his nose where it don't belong. He tried to do our work and he wrecked one of the best men we had. The crews are plenty burned about this. You haven't any choice. He goes, he's got to go or the crews'll strike."

Only Baldy's eyes moved, he pushed around a dead cigar. "This *got to* stuff is strong talk, Thorn."

He stopped when the clatter of typewriter keys started behind him. A moment later the Inspector was bending over his desk, dropping a sheet of paper there, saying in a dead voice:

"My resignation, sir, to take effect at once."

The Inspector wheeled around and went stiffly out of the room. The other two didn't speak, didn't move, and it seemed like the Inspector's words remained there, rang in their ears for minutes.

BIG DAN got the news from Thorndike His eyes went wide and his speech was jerky. "He quit. He's runnin'. Hell, he can't go far enough to get away from that. It'll follow him from one job to another. Yellow—he quit." Big Dan dropped heavily in a chair. His great shoulders rounded as though the full weight of the years rode heavily there.

And yet the first man Big Dan saw when he rode the speeder out the next morning was the Inspector. He stopped beside him. "Thought you quit?"

"I did."

That voice did something to Big Dan, hurt him deep inside, for there was defeat there, and resignation.

"Baldy put Johnny White on the driver, but he couldn't get another man down here till tomorrow. I'm taking White's shift on the rock train."

That should have been the end, Mister, and it would have been, but Old Lady Pacific pulled one more trick out of her bag. Fog!

The fog had been there when the shift went out. Like a dirty cloud huddled close to the water, burying the lightship, shortening the horizon. Around noon it began to move in.

Swirling tendrils of it, low over the heavy ground swell at first, then rising, thickening. Heavy, greasy fog that cut visibility down to nothing, choked the job.

No, not the wet-end crew, Mister, their work was compact, and spread over but little distance at one time. But the rock train—

They have to see, Mister. It's a tricky business, where death is never far away, pushing boulders that size into the sea, Boulders that weigh more than the shovel, than can smash piling the way you smash matches. The train has to move ahead or back so the big ones will land between the bents—they have to see.

The engineer, hanging half out the window of the engine cab, has to see the hand signals of the kid who clings to the ladder above the narrow walk on the side of the shovel. And that kid, in turn, must be able to see the brakeman who rides the sea end of the train. They could go too far, could spill the whole string off the jetty-end into the sea. Sure, they have safety devices and a timber chained across the track, but no one wants to test their effectiveness.

They were dumping on the north track, on the river side, far out where the rock had barely begun to show above the water. The Inspector didn't ride the train. Instead, he walked the south track, caught the car numbers as they came by.

By one o'clock the work had slowed to a crawl. Twice they had to send a man back toward the engine to relay the signals. The front end of the train vanished as if it had been cut off with a knife. They could see the car ahead, the car behind, and beyond that nothing.

The shovel runner climbed down, pulled

off his gloves. "That's it. We can't work if we can't see. One of you guys go back and tell that hog-head to yank us back to the shops."

The man grunted, started away, and a moment later was back with Big Dan.

"What the hell's the idea of the shut-down?"

The shovel runner's mouth pulled down. "I'll ramble that tea-pot of yours over that train right along with anybody you can find—when I can see. Not now, not unless you take the responsibility for all the piling that go out this shift. Besides I got no yen to go off the end of this jetty."

"We won't." Big Dan's voice boomed "We'll clean this train, and the one after this. I've got more men on the way out. We'll cut the empties out of this string, and then put a man on each car."

The shovel runner grunted and crawled back in the cab. "She's your baby, Mister."

They did that, and a half hour later the Inspector was watching the ghostly blur of the first car appear out of the fog. Seven others slid by with a man on each. Then the shovel car.

Big Dan was there, on the car back of the shovel. The Inspector's eyes stayed on the big figure, on the spread of his shoulders, on the stocky bigness of the man.

His head swung as the car came abreast, moved past. The fog was blurring the figure, was wiping it out of view, when Big Dan shouted. Shouted and stepped off the moving train into the sea!

The Inspector froze there, stunned, while another car came out of the fog. The Shay engine was abreast—pounding along under half throttle—before he came suddenly to life. He yelled, then, while his straining eyes searched the fog and found no one—even the locomotive engineer was on the side away from the Inspector. He yelled again, while the cords of his neck stood out and horror crawled in his brain. And the sound was blotted out in the hammering exhaust of the engine.

He ran, stumbling over the uneven ties, and harsh words still welled up in his raw throat. The Shay plodded on. The mist licked wetly back and he was alone on the track. The fog acted as a ghostly sounding board, magnified his voice, threw it back.

"Hey! Man-in-the-sea!"

Nothing but the steadily diminishing engine sound.

He whirled and ran back toward the place opposite that where he'd seen Big Dan last. He peered down through the maze of piling to the fog-cloaked water. A battered hat floated near a swell-washed boulder, and giant seas of rock lifted dripping shoulders out of the sea. There was nothing else, no sign of Big Dan—and then he saw him.

HE WAS on the river side of the big, flat-topped boulder, his gray head almost invisible there. The Inspector crouched, stared down. There was something else. A swell broke over the rock lifting Big Dan, and the Inspector could see. There was another man there. A black-haired man held at arm's length. A man whose arms didn't move, whose face —when it was above the water—was blood-streaked. The kid signal-man who rode the ladder on the side of the shovel.

Big Dan was thrusting one arm up then, hooking his hand in the ragged crack that split the middle of the boulder. He found a foothold and pulled the other man up, dropped him face-down across the rock, and clambered up after him.

The Inspector watched Big Dan stand up, thrust his head out and search the fog for a way to get back to the jetty. A way to get the kid back to safety. There was none, his rock was a lone island in a fifteen foot circle of green water. The Inspector shouted, and Big Dan tipped his head back, looked up.

Old Lady Pacific came in then, Mister.

She rolled a swell in from the river side. A greasy, foamless swell that rose silently behind them. The Inspector was shouting again.

"Behind you—look out!"

Big Dan pivoted, and in that ticking second the Inspector could hear his calks grit on the rock. The big man had barely time to drop flat across the kid's body, to jam his arm in the crack.

Soundless, liquid fury rising, breaking white as it topped the rock, lifted Big Dan's body. He screamed. A hoarse scream of pure animal pain. The Inspector's teeth ground, and his nails bit deep into his palms as the surging water buried Big Dan, choked off his voice.

The swell passed, broke, sloshed against the piling and rock. The Inspector could see Big Dan's body; see his arm still jammed in the crack, but bent sharply well above the wrist. Broken!

The Inspector was cursing as he climbed down to the bent-cap. Hard-jawed, bitter curses that came from deep in his throat as he fumbled for the end of the diagonal brace. He went down that brace like a falling weight, not knowing, not caring about the splinters that ripped his hands. And then his boots were slipping on sea-slimed rock.

He paused, there, while the second swell broke, mapping a course across the open space between trestles, under the north one and out to the big rock. Paused while Old Lady Pacific toyed with two bodies, plucked at them with wet fingers, pushed them closer to the rock edge. Green water hissed around the Inspector's legs and he could see the way. A rock here, another there, and then the pointed one. He moved, as the swell spent itself, in a hurrying continuous lunge.

Once his leap was short and a knife edge of granite peeled the flesh from his leg. He was in to his waist, then clawing upright again. The second, the third and then past the jetty timber to the big rock fifteen feet from the two men.

Desperately, his eyes searched for another way, a surer way, a safer way. There was none, nor was there any rock between the two. He looked down then, saw the boulders under the surface. A jagged, slippery, under-water bridge that covered half the remaining distance. Beyond that——

"Go back, you fool!"

The Inspector's head jerked up to meet his father's pain-bright eyes. There was pride in those eyes, Mister, pride that the kid had come, and fear for what would happen.

He said it again, "Go back, you fool!"

A taut, jerked out, "Go to hell," and the Inspector was off the rock, staggering thigh-deep in the sea, splashing, floundering, slipping. He was half way there when the bottom went out from under him.

He swallowed salt water, and foam-torn bubbles went past his eyes. Boiling water twisted his body. Then, sharp rock was under his clutching fingers and his head was above water again. He hung there, sucking air into tortured lungs, and then he climbed painfully on top of the rock.

Big Dan's thin voice seemed to come from a distance. "Get my arm out."

The Inspector bent over, straddled the big man's body, and heaved.

Slow, hard work lifting two hundred and forty pounds of dead weight when your boots slip and the clothes pull loose in your fingers. Slow work when you keep one eye on the sea. Twice he had him nearly out, and twice the Old Lady

threw a swell at them. A swell that surged and tore at his body, left him with his boot heel wedged in the crack and his body flat across the others. He offered little resistance to the wave that way, facing it, face down with both hands hooked over the rock edge.

Three times he straightened, gasping for breath, and three times he heaved at that dead weight. The third time he got Big Dan's arms free.

The big man's eyes rolled up, he muttered, "Why'd you come? You can't do any good out here. Just three of us instead of two."

Flat, almost snarled words, "Why'd you?"

"I saw him go. The damn fool kid was leaning on the rail, leaning way out, trying to see the hogger. The shovel runner decided to move up then and the jerk spilled him over. He landed on a rock—I came after him."

THE Inspector couldn't turn Big Dan's inert body around to face the sea. There wasn't room, there wasn't time. So he left him facing the ghostly bulk of the jetty, heaved him alongside the crack, and pushed the whole length of his leg deep into that. He talked as he worked. "You won't give much surface for the water to bear on, this way. Hang on with your good hand. If you'd been on your belly when the first swell hit, you wouldn't've broken your arm."

Another swell, then, a big one that ground the Inspector's face hard against the rock, flattened his body there. The kid's limp body rolled in the grip of the water, strained against the Inspector's legs.

And when it was gone Big Dan's muffled voice said, "Get back up on the jetty while you still can. Get up there and yell your head off."

"Sure, and leave you here for bird-bait!"

The Inspector lifted his head to listen. He could hear the Shay panting hurriedly, but the fog-distorted sound made it impossible to tell how far away the engine was. Then voices, faint, excited voices.

Big Dan had been listening too. "They are hunting in one place, instead of the length of the jetty; we're licked."

Still another rushing swell, another age while the chill of the water bit through the flesh to numb the very bones. Another unmeasured age while straining lungs cried for air.

The fog seemed thicker after the wave had gone. The jetty bulk barely visible. The Inspector twisted his head to throw the words at Big Dan.

"The big, hard guy, huh, harder than drill steel. That's what the crews say about you. Hard, hell, you're jelly clear to the core. You'd go overboard for any careless fool. You the big, tough—"

Old Lady Pacific again. Throwing water at them, wearing them out, toying with the three of them. Waiting.

Big Dan didn't speak after that wave passed and then time ceased to have meaning. The world diminished until there was only that vague circle of water. Only a slippery, rough-edged rock. Only cold. Only——

And Old Lady Pacific plucked at them, rolled up a full, green swell.

The feeling had gone out of the Inspector's hands. He had to look, each time, and see if they were still where they belonged. One clutching the rock-edge, one hooked in the kid's belt. The numbness got into his brain then and even that ceased to have meaning. Hands, that were blue with cold, cramped hands that oozed blood around the nails. He looked, each time, long after he had forgotten why. He talked too. Cursed the kid's white face, the dead weight of his body.

"You got us into this—ought to let you——"

Sound pounded into his brain then, familiar sound, the exhaust beat of a Shay engine. He remembered then, they were looking for him. He yelled.

After seconds he realized that the

hoarse croak was his own voice. That the train had gone past. That there wasn't a chance.

The whole crew were looking for them then. The wet-end gang had dropped their tools and poured back along that mile of track to search. They knew they had to be off on the river side, or between the trestles. If they were between the trestles they would find them. They'd be hospital cases, but at least there'd be a chance. On the river side it was different. There was hope, sure, for the ground swell wasn't much and the tide was just turning. But there was nothing certain about it.

Old Lady Pacific had turned them up, Mister, the bull-necks will vouch for that. She tipped the fog up, not much but enough for peering eyes to see the huddled bodies on the rock. There were lines, then, and sure-footed men going down, floundering out through the swells.

They had to pry the Inspector's fingers loose from the kid's belt. He didn't hear the voices, nor feel the rope bite under his arms when a rigger yelled:

"Take it away."

YOU'RE wondering what happened then, Mister? They finished the job, but the Inspector, Big Dan and the brakeman didn't see that. They had them in three white hospital beds, and it took one good, big man to keep them there.

She's tough, that Old Lady Pacific, tough enough to know a fighter, to know the real breed of building men. So she held off. The winter storms were two weeks late.

There wasn't much to it; they had lumber then, and the bull-necks built trestle, and spilled rock tonnage into the sea just the same as if Big Dan had been looking down their necks.

Thorndike gave them their orders. "Dan says he wants a good job, just the same as if the Inspector was here. Everything just the way it says in the spec's."

So they did it just that way. They finished the job, and buttoned it up tight and the Old Lady went to work. The rock is still there now, solid, unmovable, but the rest is gone, but they did it right, the way the kid wanted it done.

A reporter found them in the same room, asked for the story.

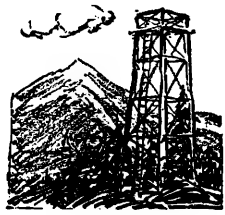
Big Dan grinned at him, "Ask the snubnose, ask him. He's the orneriest, dumbest brass-hat that ever rejected a load of good lumber. He's——"

"Comin' from you, that's good." The Inspector propped himself up on one elbow. "He's an old thief, takes a crew of men to keep him from stealin' his own shirt. He's crooked an' he'd try to build a jetty out of balsa if he thought he could save a dime that way."

So the reporter didn't get the story, not from them, they were all wound up shouting at each other. And when the reporter went out they grinned. Big, ear-to-ear grins.

Old Lady Pacific is grinning, too, Mister, because Big Dan got the North Jetty Contract.

Yes, and the Inspector has been assigned to the job. That's right, the Old Lady likes a good fight.



A Woods Tick Who Had a Lot to Learn

RUN, SHEEP, RUN

By

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Big Horn," "High Lead Salvage," etc.

CAPTAIN HALLER, the United States Army officer in command of the Table Mountain camp, Civilian Conservation Corps, read the letter over twice, then handed it to the local forest ranger. "A letter like that gets under a man's hide," he said, "particularly when you read between the lines and catch the picture of a girl's faith in a boy, and her hope for his future."

Tim Trent pulled the brim of his Forest Service hat down over his eyes, stretched out his long legs, tilted back in the camp chair and read:

"DEAR SIR:

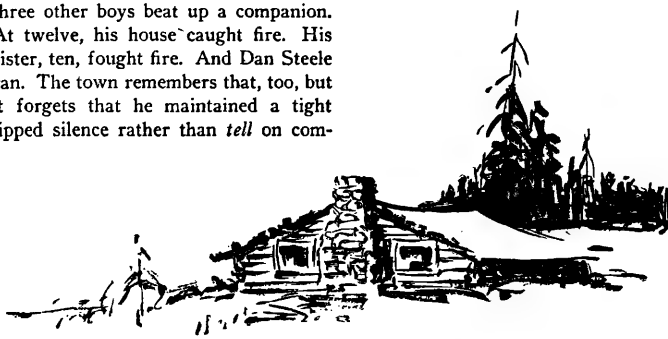
"Perhaps a girl should not write as freely and frankly as I plan to write you, but if it means a boy's salvation and that girl's happiness, then it seems the sensible thing to do.

"In a world where physical courage is rated higher than moral, Dan is considered a coward. Our town remembers him as a boy of eleven who ran while three other boys beat up a companion. At twelve, his house caught fire. His sister, ten, fought fire. And Dan Steele ran. The town remembers that, too, but it forgets that he maintained a tight lipped silence rather than *tell* on companions involved in an escapade. He was expelled from school for that."

"Small towns can be pretty cruel to a kid," Tim Trent observed. "Some things that happened to me still sting." He resumed reading:

"After that I had to watch Dan slowly go to pieces. There was nothing for him to do—nothing for most of our generation. The CCC was organized and it was supposed to give boys a breathing spell, build them up in bodies and mind, and send them back equipped to make a place for themselves. And that is just what happened.

"Dan and I talked it over. He thought if he went West with the CCC he could get a new grip on life, pick up a good piece of farm land, then we'd marry and make a go of it. He enrolled and his first letters from the West were filled with enthusiasm. He'd even found the land he wanted. Then something happened. He wrote and told me to



forget him. I can't forget him, because I know he has the courage, if he can but overcome the physical coward complex. You see, I have figured it all out. Won't you help me, please, by helping him? Sincerely,

"VERNA LAWSON."

"Something happened all right," the ranger grimly observed. "A slashing fire got away from a rancher. The CCC boys were sent down to fight it. Dan Steele among them. A spark dropped among a thicket of dead sword ferns. You know what happens—they fairly explode. Dan turned yellow and cleared out. They saw him running down a gulch in the midst of the rancher's sheep which were also stampeding because they were afraid of fire."

"So that's what the boys meant when they yell, 'Run, Sheep, Run!' at Steele?" the captain said thoughtfully. "Running this time wasn't important. But there are times, in the business of fighting forest fires when cowardice might mean the death of several men. And the boys know it. Well, what's to be done? Quitting his girl looks like the end."

"Send for him," the ranger suggested. "Our business is putting men back onto their feet."

Ten minutes later Dan Steele entered the captain's quarters. He was a young fellow of about twenty-two years, of medium build, with blond hair and blue eyes that were filled with bitterness and resentment. His handsome face was sullen. "Sit down, Steele," the captain said. "We want to talk over things. Some of the folks back home haven't heard from you lately, and they want to know how you're getting along."

"Who wrote, Verna Lawson?" Steele asked sharply.

"Yes. She still has faith——"

"She's always had faith. She's fine, strong and has never lost her courage," Steele said. "And she had to fall in love with a yellow coyote like me. There's no justice in life. She should have fallen in love with a *man*. But she was right in one respect—some shreds of decency remained. I had courage enough to sit down and write a letter telling her to forget me."

The ranger knew by the expression on the youth's face that it had torn his heart out to do it. "Some women see pretty deep into the man they love," he said slowly. "Far deeper than the world sees."

"I clung to that for awhile," Steele answered, "then I found myself running with a flock of bleating sheep. Then I knew all the answers. A man either has it inside of him, or he hasn't. When he calls on courage it responds if it's there. If it isn't there he suddenly finds himself —running with sheep. The kindest thing you can write Verna is that the world has sized me up right, and she's wrong. Let her have a good big hurt now and get it over with. It's better than a lifetime of little hurts and despair. I'm leaving the CCC on the first of the month." The bitterness in his face deepened. "I'm going to find a lot of sheep to run with."

HE WALKED out, leaving ranger and army officer alone. "I suppose," the ranger mused, "that if we had a case history of Steele we'd find that he was frightened by fire as a baby, or something."

"That girl refuses to admit defeat," the captain growled; "well, my life has been spent dealing with all kinds of men. And so has yours, Trent. We're not admitting defeat either. What had we better do next?"

"It's a case for Terry Reagan, I guess," the ranger answered.

"Terry Reagan! Do you mean the Terry Reagan that organized a bunch of wood ticks and chased all the loggers out of Boomtown?" the captain demanded.

"Yes, and the Terry Reagan who met a runaway logging train with a locomotive and brought it to a stop. And the Terry Reagan who—well, you know Terry."

"You bet I do." The captain spoke as if

Reagan was one of his favorite characters. "But his type, which knows only courage, couldn't possibly have any sympathy with Dan Steele. He wouldn't understand the case."

"That's where you're wrong, Captain. There was a time when Terry Reagan was the yellowest man in the CCC," the ranger explained to the captain's astonishment. "He fought it out, with what little help I gave him. And that's why I've never quite lost faith in Dan Steele. I think we had better arrange Reagan's transfer. He's always wanted to look over this particular stretch of Puget Sound—the fishing is exceptionally good."

A WEEK later the Table Mountain CCC camp knew a man had arrived in its midst. Terry Reagan's shoulders were wide and his chest deep. His profile was like something chiseled from granite and left unpolished. He had jet black hair and Irish blue eyes that missed nothing. His smile was quick, and sympathetic—and unexpected when one considered the fighting jaw. It was said in the CCC camps that he could lick his weight in wildcats. And he looked the part.

He listened quietly as the forest ranger related Dan Steele's history. Several times he shot a puzzled glance in the ranger's direction. "Say, Trent," he growled, "are you trying to kid me? That's my history, almost, except the girl got tired of waiting and married a better man. And I don't blame her."

"No, I'm not kidding you, Terry," Trent answered, "I'm telling you a straight story. If you think you can do anything for Steele, perhaps we had better arrange that you both be transferred to a camp where his history isn't known—where the boys don't yell, 'Run, Sheep, Run,' at him."

"This is the place for the showdown," Terry Reagan declared. "When he wins, the cheers will be all the more appreciated."

"Then you think he's going to win?" the captain asked.

"You're darned right he's going to win," Reagan snorted. "He may have his moments when he doubts, but he'll win. I'll see to that. I'm as good as kissing his bride right now."

The ranger didn't laugh. This was not the outburst of a conceited man. Rather, it was an expression of confidence. Terry Reagan never boasted of his own triumphs, but he never hesitated to express complete faith in his ability to make some other fellow find himself.

"What makes you think Dan will let you kiss the bride?" the ranger asked in a tone of voiced calculation to sting Reagan to retorting.

"I'll be best man when Verna comes out to marry him won't I?" Terry answered. "Now where'll I find this mug? Down in Boomtown trying to paint the town red on the pay of a woods tick?"

"I think you'll find him down on Rainbow Creek."

"Fishing?"

"No, down on the old Benson place dreaming of what might have happened," the ranger answered.

"I think I'll go fishing over the week end," Terry mused.

TERRY REAGAN dropped a fly in an eddying pool, grinned and snaked out a ten inch trout that had lurked under a cedar puncheon bridge just below the pool. He took out a second, then a third, and then crossed the bridge and entered a clearing. Forty or fifty years ago some pioneer had broken his heart and back

clearing stumps from the rich bottom land. He had built a cabin, planted fruit trees and fenced a pasture, then died. Hunters had used the cabin in the years following. Occasionally a trapper made it his headquarters for a year or two. From time to time men fought the weeds and trimmed the fruit trees. Yet nature was gradually winning. Now the land waited for another man and girl with plenty of hope and courage.

Terry Reagan read the story at a glance. There were dozens like it throughout the Puget Sound timber country. He entered the cabin through the back door and looked around. It was clean, and there were new dishes on the kitchen shelf. Someone had at some time planted roses in front of the cabin and they were beginning to climb around the windows.

A vegetable garden flourished in the rich, black loam bordering the creek, but the weeds were also flourishing. Dan Steele sat on a fence scowling at the weeds. "Hating himself," Terry muttered. "I know. And it's a terrible feeling. You have to go through it to understand."

Terry stepped onto the front porch and noted further details. A man's heart had gone into the work done about the cabin. He had thought of making a girl comfortable and happy while he attacked the weeds growing in the pasture and later on stocked it with dairy cattle.

"Hello," he called.

Dan Steele turned in a flash and there was the expression on his face of a man who sees an intruder in his home. "Hello," he answered shortly.

Terry joined him and a strained silence fell between them. "I'd heard about the old Benson place," he said presently, "but I didn't think it would be as nice as it is. The whole business can be bought for taxes. There's a couple of years living in the telephone poles a man could get out of that second-growth timber on the bench. After that a dairy herd should give a fellow all the reasonable comforts of life."

"A couple of years living?" Dan Steele asked.

"What do you think? You've learned something of falling and cruising timber since you came into the CCC," Terry said. "Of course, if a fire should break loose in those old windfalls on the bench above the creek, it would probably wipe all this out. If the Forest Service authorizes the CCC to clean up the windfalls that'll reduce the fire hazard and——"

"You talk like you were figuring to buy the place?" Dan growled.

"Why shouldn't I?" Terry answered. "It can be had for the price of the taxes." He watched Steele's face darken with resentment, then said, "I'm a new man in these parts—sort of a straw boss—and my name's Terry Reagan." He offered his hand.

"I'm Dan Steele," the other answered, shaking the extended hand without enthusiasm. "How's fishing?"

"Good. That cabin is home-like and I think I'll move in and fry my trout. Come up, and help me eat them, Steele," Terry said. "In its time I'll bet that cabin has seen many a man sitting across the table from another, eating trout from Rainbow Creek. Personally, though, I'd rather see the right girl." He saw a flash of pain cross Steele's face. "And I rather like the idea," he continued grimly. "It's a dream I may make come true."

That night while Dan Steele sat on the porch, smoked and brooded, Terry Reagan sat down at the kitchen table, and wrote a long letter to a girl. "If you've got the courage to gamble and make the break," the letter concluded, "I know you'll love this place. Besides a stand of timber and a trout stream it is almost ringed by snow-capped mountains. Whoever takes the right care of this little ranch will in turn be cared for by it. But we must act fast or somebody else will grab it. The country's full of CCC men who would like to pick up such a place, then send for the girl back home."

Dan Steele returned to the kitchen and glanced at Terry. "Still writing that letter?" he observed. "Well, you must have a lot to say."

"It takes lots of words to describe this country to a girl," Terry replied, "and try and sell her on the idea of moving West to this ranch and help a fellow make a go of it."

"M-A-A-AAAH! M-a-a-aaaah!" The bleating of sheep echoed across the flat a mile above the old Benson place. Dan Steele whirled in his tracks and glowered at the CCC men behind him. "Who did that?" he snarled.

"Keep your shirt on, Dan," Terry Reagan admonished. "Nobody's trying to kid you. A sheep really made that noise. The owner of the old Benson place showed up two days ago and took possession. She's bought a few head of sheep to graze on the hillside."

"So it was really bought for taxes," Dan muttered. "I did a lot on that place—had an idea I'd take root. And I did for a month or so, then—I ran with sheep. Aw, what the hell!"

He turned his bitter eyes onto his work. A small gang, under Terry, was clearing the flat of snags, brush and windfalls. Later the piles would be burned and the area replanted. It was part of a comprehensive plan to reduce fire hazards and grow new timber.

Naked from the waist up, the CCC boys worked steadily under Terry's watchful eyes. Their bronzed shoulders glistened with sweat, and their muscles rippled beautifully under the tough skin.

"And six months ago," Terry reflected, "most of them were skinny, pasty-faced city kids wondering where their next meal was coming from."

As he watched. the brush stirred, and a breeze moved over the flat towards the great fir forest that swept almost from tidewater to snowline. "It's too bad we can't burn this brush now," Terry mused. "If a fire once got started, it'd be in that big timber before we could even begin to fight it. We'd need an east wind that would blow sparks away from the green forest."

Prevailing winds were west and southwest. He made his way to the nearest Forest Service telephone and reported the progress his gang was making. "We've cut a wide lane between green timber and the rest of the flat," he said to the ranger, "but the stuff ahead is the thickest I've ever seen. It'll take weeks to drag it out."

"And we can't spare the men," Trent answered. "In fact I've got to call back most of your gang. We're placing bridge timbers across Snow Creek and it takes plenty of man-power."

"Leave Dan Steele with me," Terry replied, "and you can have the rest. What is the weather report?"

"The hot spell is due to last three more days at least," the ranger replied. "We're rushing the Snow Creek bridge so we can get trucks, men and fire equipment to the national forest in a hurry if a fire breaks out there. You and Steele had better patrol your area and let the work slide for a few days. If some fisherman should get into the brush along Rainbow Creek and drop a match, with this west wind blowing——"

His silence was dramatic. O.K.," Terry agreed, "I'll send out all the boys except Steele."

They left that evening and Steele watched them march out of camp. "Why wasn't I included?" he asked very suspiciously.

"Search me," Terry answered. "Trent thought I should have one man to help me keep an eye on things. Well, let's turn in."

Terry Reagan awakened that night and instinctively sniffed. The wind had died down, the air was dead. He half expected to smell smoke, but the air was sweet enough. He stepped to the tent door and looked out. The moon shone gloomily

through haze created by distant forest fires.

Terry returned to bed and slept until dawn, then he got up and walked about camp. Birds were singing and belated night creatures of prey were returning to the big forest. He saw an owl streak across the clearing and vanish in the blackness of the somber firs; a cougar crossed a log spanning a gulch and disappeared with the silence of blowing vapor.

Wind stirred again in the tree tops and Terry Reagan whistled softly. He built a fire, cooked breakfast and yelled at Dan Steele. Dan was bleary-eyed. He was not sleeping well these days, but offered no explanation. "He's worried over his girl and the fact someone's moved into the cabin and is busy on the old ranch. I suppose he'd kill me if he knew I'd——" The coffee boiled over and interrupted his reflections.

"The wind's changed," Dan Steel observed, as he toyed with bacon and eggs. "That's a break."

"Have you been worrying about fire?"

THE color drained from Dan's face. He did not need to answer. Terry knew the terrible fear that he might be called on to fight fire had been with him constantly during the dry spell. "Everybody's been worrying about it," Dan said shortly. "If Trent had had the men this firetrap would've been cleaned out long ago. What do we do today?"

"Check on Rainbow Creek and make sure nobody's gone up there fishing," Terry answered. "Come on."

An hour later they dropped into Rainbow Creek. The stream was low and ran lazily from pool to pool. Big rainbow trout moved indolently among the shadows cast by submerged boulders. As they watched, the sun darkened, like the passing of a cloud. It was smoke! Dan Steele whirled in his tracks. "Fire!" he yelled hoarsely. "The flat's ablaze."

A column of smoke was mounting high and rolling west. "It's lucky the wind's blowing from the east," Terry answered. "Come on! There're two of us to control an awful lot of blaze."

"Wha-wha-what're you going to do?" Dan faltered. Terry had read of men who died slowly of fright, but he had never seen such a person. And if the spectacle was anything like the one Dan presented Terry didn't want to see it.

"Brace up, Dan!" Terry said sharply. "There's nothing to worry about. It'll sweep the flat and save the CCC thousands of hours of hard work. Of course, if we don't control it, it'll go down the Rainbow Creek canyon and wipe out the old Benson place. It'd whip through the second-growth and ruin a few thousand dollars worth of potential telephone poles, then burn itself out in that cut-over land."

Terry climbed up the bank and started a backfire. If he could stop the flames from roaring through the canyon he would save a creek teeming with trout. And Terry liked to fish. "We'd better go easy on this," Dan advised. "The fire might get in behind us." His jaw was set to keep his teeth from chattering and his hands were shaking. His face was a sickly green and his lower lip hung loosely. It was a pretty terrible sight. Terry knocked him sprawling into the next gulch, hoping he would fight back, but the man only whimpered.

"Fire that brush," Terry shouted. "It'll sweep up to the flat and stop fire from running down the gulch into the canyon. Fire it, or by the gods of the heathen Eskimo I'll drop a rock on your head."

Terry left him standing there dropping burning matches into a clump of dead ferns. He ran on and spread the backfire. He returned as the frightened Dan

was emerging from the gulch. "Pull yourself together," Terry urged. "You can beat this thing. A man with courage enough to admit he's a coward and to refuse to drag a girl down to what he thought was his level, can't be completely physically yellow."

"You either have the something that makes you stand up to physical danger or you don't," Dan muttered, more to himself than to Terry. "I can't face fire. And I won't!"

He was gone before Terry could stop him, running over the flat, lashed on by stark terror. Terry raced a hundred rods and never gained. Half a mile away the flames were moving as fast as a man could trot. Above the roar he heard the bleat of sheep. The small band, smelling smoke, were stampeding. "Run, sheep, run!" Terry yelled.

DAN STEELE racing down a steep bluff found himself in the midst of the sheep before he realized it. There was nothing unusual in the situation—terror maddened creatures are like water and flow along the line of least resistance. A depression in the flat drew them. "Run, sheep, run!" Terry's voice taunted him and the bleating sheep mocked him. He stopped, as deep within him the vague spark of physical courage flamed. He set his jaw and cursed in self-disgust. The flame ran along the flat and threatened to cut off retreat. A burning ember eddied briefly above his head, then dropped.

It struck his shoulder and burned right through the issue shirt and seared the skin. The years fell back, and suddenly he remembered—a baby crawling on the kitchen floor; a spark snapped from the stove and flame burning his clothing.

He remembered now his horror as he tried to creep from the thing riding his back. He remembered pain, and his mother's scream, then a deluge of water and comfort in her arms. He found himself running; trying to escape as he had tried in his infancy. Ahead, the frightened sheep milled.

Terry Reagan fairly dived from the brush and bore Dan Steele to earth. "You don't run out on me," he panted.

"Let me go. I can't help it," Dan pleaded. "I haven't got what it takes. Let me go!" He jumped up and broke away, but Terry got in front of him.

Dan was a cornered rat now, lashed by the crackling flames. His fist shot out and crashed against Terry's jaw. Terry saw stars and his knees sagged. He grinned—an unholy, triumphant grin. He lashed back and cut Dan's eye. His right went home and Dan swayed. "So you can't fight, eh?" Terry sneered. "You haven't got what it takes."

"I can't face—fire," Dan panted.

"We've got two minutes to decide a lot of things—two minutes and no more. By that time the blaze will be beyond control," Terry said. "And that means the trees that'll supply telephone poles will go, then the old Benson place. The prospect of that burning up hurts, don't it?"

There was a taunt in Terry's voice. "You took root on that ground all right," he continued without mercy. "Now I'll tell you something else. A lot of guys had their eyes on this spot—guys with girls back east, like you. Well, I sent for your girl. Verna Lawson's down there now, trying to make a go of it until you get out of the CCC."

"I don't believe it. You're saying that to make me fight," Dan said thickly.

"You've got to believe me. You can't gamble that it isn't Verna," Terry snarled. "She's down there. Either you stay with me, or you go trooping past her door—with the sheep. Get the pump we cached last week under that big windfall." He gave Dan a push that sent him sprawling.

"Verna, down there. In—our cabin," Dan muttered. He felt a new emotion stirring within his breast—a tigerish surge of fury that filled him with hate for the red death roaring over the flat. He looked

back and saw Terry Reagan crawling towards a hummock. A backfire beyond that hummock might halt the fire—and it might prove a death trap.

Dan got the pump and a reel of hose. A burning ember ate through his sleeve and seared his arm. He swore, and his teeth gleamed through the charcoal smear on his face. He looked back. The flames were meeting behind, gates that were slowly closing. And framed in the closing gateway he saw the old Benson cabin and a slip of a girl wetting down the roof.

"Coming, Terry!" Dan shouted.

HE STUMBLED through the swirling smoke, set up the portable, gasoline pump and started it. Water sucked from Rainbow Creek surged through the hose and shot from the nozzle. A billow of flame arched above them and descended. It was like the breath of a blast furnace. Neither man dare breathe. A fatalistic calm settled on Dan Steele.

Death was close now, but he knew if he survived he would never fear death in any form again. He glanced sharply at Terry Reagan. "She looks bad, Terry," he said.

"Plenty bad. Water's holding it back in front," Terry answered. "If it doesn't jump the fire-break I dug behind——"

Dan shifted the hose and extended his right hand. They shook. "Thanks, Terry. I nearly ran with sheep again. You stopped me, you made me think I was fighting for Verna and that home I fixed up for her down there. I believed it just long enough to get a hold of myself. It's all right that you lied, and that I fought for some other fellow's girl. If I live——"

He stopped. And Terry saw a hunger for the place down the valley come into his eyes. He had taken root quickly, permanently, and hardly realized it. "Well," Dan concluded, "maybe it isn't too late. Maybe Verna waited. And maybe—— there's another spot like the Benson place." He shifted the stream and drenched the flames creeping up behind them.

They crouched low and waited. There was nothing more they could do. An hour passed, the roar of moving flames slackened and died. Glowings snags lay everywhere, but the dense smoke drifted away. "Let's go down to the cabin," Dan said. "That girl should at least give us a square meal. Then we'll have to come back and keep an eye on the fire. It was a lucky blaze, any way you figure it, Terry. It straightened me out; it cleaned out the flat and released CCC boys for other work in the future. It's a good thing the wind was from the east."

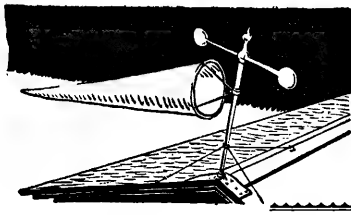
They stopped at the old Benson cabin and Terry knocked. He stepped back and waited. The door opened and its rough casing framed a slim girl, with blue eyes and a courageous face. A light, that brought a lump to Terry's throat, filled the girl's eyes. "Dan!" she said softly. "Dan——"

Dan Steele drew in a deep breath. "Verna," he exclaimed. "Oh—my darling. That blasted Reagan didn't lie, then. He didn't lie. I was really fighting our own battle—out there."

Terry Reagan trudged wearily from the old Benson place to a Forest Service telephone screwed to a tree. He picked up the receiver and called ranger Tim Trent. "Hello, Tim," he said, "Terry Reagan reporting the fire on the Rainbow Creek flat under control. It turned out about as I expected. When that east wind came along I dropped a match or two where it would do the most good. For a time it was touch and go, though, then Dan Steele came through and we fought the fire to a finish. The expression on Dan's face when Verna came to the door was worth all the trouble."

"Then that winds up your work with Dan Steele," the ranger suggested.

"Well not quite," Terry Reagan answered. "I've still got to kiss the bride."



WINTERKILL

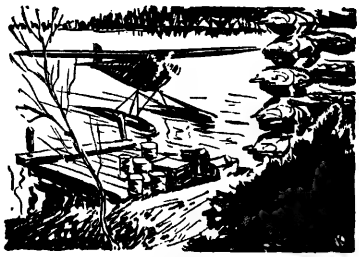
WHEN C. I. (Simon in person) Lagree started looking for a new test pilot, last time, it meant that his very-recent man in that uncertain position had just walked out on him. That man was Tom Penn; and you might say that Tom and C. I. Lagree parted company at the lucky end of a long parachute jump. Not, of course, that Simon-in-person Lagree was along when said chute drop was made. No, the bit of quick caterpillaring was all Penn's. And the only interest C. I. Lagree had in the affair was the new LOC ship that had suddenly gone to pieces in Tom Penn's hands. With the disintegration of that new-model LOC plane, at a time when the new model was already overdue at Uncle Sam's test base, a likely fat contract also fell apart for Lagree Aircraft Co. And that's why Simon-in-person had blown up when Tom Penn came down—figuratively on C. I.'s office carpet—and undertook to explain that that LOC ship wasn't all that a ship for U. S. Air Corps should be. But heck, Tom Penn didn't like that test job anyway! What's more, he didn't like C. I. Lagree's particular style. To begin with, C. I. had a reputation for being hard on test pilots; and Tom Penn's brief stay had substantiated the oft-spoken accusation, satisfying him that Simon-in-person was heavy with the whip. But Penn wasn't a man who whipped easily—or at all.

However, when a plane goes to pieces high in the sky, even off the coast of Southern California where many strange things of air happen, it's news. And when a prominent pilot, with said ship snapping apart all around him, steps out by the count, and the white flower blooms, that's bound to be told on all front pages. What's more to the point, the telling is certain to be built up, spread on thickly, twanged to the highest thrill. Well, Lagree Aircraft Co., with its millions and reputation to be considered, would see to it that the telling was as it should be. At least, for the best interests of Lagree Aircraft and Lagree Aircraft's future business.

No pilot, not even one who cut his flying teeth on German gun-sight rings, rides the silk train without knowing some very intense afterthoughts. There are so many buts and ifs attending the grand opening of a chute. And *if* the thing hadn't gone off as it had, Tom Penn knew that he wouldn't be there in the Pacific Wings

By
ANDREW A. CAFFREY

Author of "On Proving Ground," "That Job Is Open Again," etc.



Club, next day, reading all about it. *But* the bailing-out detail had been handled in a real masterly manner, and Tom Penn was alive to such an extent that he was just chock-full of afterthoughts. And in this case the afterthoughts really didn't get to working till after Tom had read C. I. Lagree's account of what had happened to that fine, new-model LOC ship —a model into whose design, manufacture and future Lagree Aircraft had placed some six figures in real money. Still and all, Simon-in-person's stated reason for the ship's failure wasn't the true cause. He had told the press that Pilot Penn, using not-too-good flying judgment, had put that big, two-place, wide-winged LOC down through a power dive. Swell reading that—power dive! But both Simon-in-person and Tom Penn knew that the real, nasty reason for the sudden, definite end —in so far as Air Corps buying orders were concerned—of the LOC was outright structural failure. Tom Penn had warned C. I. Lagree against that structural weak point, too; only to have Simon-in-person advise him to keep t'hell out of the chief engineer's department and stick to his own spinning, looping and—power diving. You see, Tom Penn had long been a Hollywood fixture; and Simon-in-person labored under the wrong impression that Tom Penn was always flying for the gallery. A very wrong idea, for Tom Penn is one of the very few who can live there, yet either take or not take his Hollywood.

SO Simon-in-person said that he had cracked 'er wide open in a power dive, eh? Hard to take! Power diving—were you to ask Tom Penn — belongs to the round-heels of air. But the thing that gave Penn his biggest pain was the tough fact that C. I. Lagree knew that it didn't take a power dive to shake a Lagree ship apart, for the thing had been done only too often before now. Toughest of all, though, Tom Penn was in no position to call Simon-in-person in this matter; for Tom Penn had a secret with a twelve-year-old boy, and the swell kid was Simon-in-person's own offspring, young Ace.

Well, summing up all afterthoughts, Tom Penn realized that he had made only one mistake. One mistake that the men of his flying world could really hold against him. One mistake that was a mistake technically, ethically and everlastingly —he should have obeyed that impulse and

To and For Us Ordinary Lovers of Air There's Nothing But Air

resigned only over C. I. Lagree's prone body. Said prone body being right there on Simon-in-person's own office floor, when said Simon first yelled, "Ya damned fourflushin' so-and-so Penn! Ya had to do a power dive for the crowds on the beaches, eh? You and your damned Hollywood, etc., etc."

But Tom Penn, because of Ace and his big secret with Ace, allowed that smashing opportunity to pass; and now he sat there in that view-side lounge of the Pacific Wings Club, atop that behind-Hollywood mountain, and waxed sore over being the sort of a hero described in all the papers. The sort of a flying heel who would dive a ship into its assorted parts, out over the Pacific, while doing an ordinary instrument-testing hop. It had him down.

Tom Penn was alone in that Wings Club lounge, that high lounge that overlooks all the western sky, when Jack Washington came in to stand, blink his eyes against the white sunlight and say:

"Ah, I thought I'd locate you here, Ex-pilot Penn. And one hell of a mess you made of that last position you held so—shall we say?—so precariously. Dove the wings off a Lagree ship! Dove 'em off so's all who read may wonder at the utter daring—shall we call it?—of such a man."

"The danged public schools—teaching guys like you how to read!" Tom Penn growled. "But what's on your mind, Jack?"

"You," Jack Washington made known, sitting as ordered. "At a time like this I believe that all good men should come to the aid of a down-and-out pilot. And so believing, I said to the boys in the front office 'I think I'll run up to the Wings Club and offer this Penn guy a chance for his coffee and cakes. The guy's out now, way out, and maybe we can get him cheap. He must feel cheap, cheap as the very devil—doing a power dive on old Simon-in-person Lagree'."

"And right you were," Tom Penn agreed. "If I owned a high hat—that is, a real, government-limousine-fitting high hat—I'd put it on and walk under a snake in high grass just to prove how low I feel. What did you say about a job?"

Jack Washington, one of the very best of Hollywood's many producer-director combinations, said, "With my unit, Tom. I'm taking the entire cast of 'Winterkill' up into the Canadian Rockies for exteriors. I'm going to use my camera plane on lots of the mountain shots. We expect to cover lotsa territory. Maybe go as far north as the Yukon, if I can't get what I want in the line of snow around Banff or Lake Louise. So I want a fair pilot on this job; but say, listen feller — no power dives!"

"You've hired on a non-diving pilot," Tom Penn said. "Do I hop your old BX-3 camera job north from here?"

"You do; and I'm sailing with you," Jack Washington made known.

"Brave guy," Tom Penn said.

"How do you mean—courageous?" Washington asked.

"WHY," Penn drawled, "if I wasn't an on-the-beach, outa-luck pilot you couldn't hire me to sit in that old job, not even if it was in the hangar, doors closed and locked, and out of gas. That old BX-3, before you movie people

bought it from Lee Glab, served Uncle Sam's Air Corps for four years. Lee flew it on odd jobs, very odd jobs, for the better part of two tough years. You've had it more than a year; and your gang has

used it like a hired horse. Anyway, put all them there scattered years together and they spell something like seven. Seven's a good number when you make it on the first roll, Jack; but it's not so good when multiplied by the yearly average of air hours that old bus has put in. Still and all, it's a good ship for a location job like this Canadian thing. The company won't mind it a bit when we hang the old crock on a high crag."

"You wouldn't be kiddin' me?" Jack Washington asked. "It can't be that you're trying to sell the studio another ship?"

"The answer is no on both quick questions," Tom Penn said.

"But if we fly low and slow, go round high hills and under big bridges, keep out of heavy timber and long tunnels, this BX-3 might get us there and back, eh?" Washington then asked.

"Hypothetically, yes," Penn agreed—"but that makes no allowances for the well-known fact that the Fool Killer still bags lots of guys found flying here and there in crazy ships."

"If the Fool Killer can't pot 'em out of a power dive," Jack Washington thought to remark, "what chance is he going to have getting two boys who'll be doing absolutely nothing more than flying safe and sane? So we'll stick to the good old BX-3; and I'll ride north with you. Till then"—Jack Washington got up to leave—"you sit right here, on straight studio time, where you'll be safe. I'll give you a call within the next two-three days—or weeks. Or as soon as we're all set to roll the unit north."

"My feet'll have deep, non-slip crescents worn in this window-sill, if it takes all summer," Penn promised, "for I'll wait. And thanks for the leg-up, Jack. M'gosh, you don't know what it is to be out of work for the better part of half a day."

"Don't mention it!" Washington said. "Gosh, I think nothing of tossing bums as high as two bits. What if a guy is just a pilot—hasn't he got as much right to live as a regular white man? Sure he has."

"That's swell," Tom Penn enthused.

On his way out, Washington turned back. "Listen, Tom," he said, "I know that these newspaper accounts of yesterday's doings are all wrong. Everything in said papers makes known that 'Mr. C. I. Lagree informed the press, etc., etc.' Knowing something of Mr. Lagree, Simon-in-person to youse flying guys, I know that the gent wouldn't hesitate to shag a good pilot across the floating ice of ill repute, with the hounds of rotten publicity in full cry. So, just between a couple of good old heavy drinkers, what came off out there yesterday, Tom?"

"I shouldn't tell this, Jack; not even to you," Tom Penn said. "But, in a way, you have a right to know. It's under your hat, though. And remember that, Jack. Well, to begin with, this LOC ship had a shimmy point where the two panels of the monoplane spread butted together. Day before the crash, I advised Simon-in-person to slap a large-size fishplate over that center-section weak spot. He told me what I could do with my suggestion. Anyway, that's where the ship broke wide open. But first, she was in a hard dive, sure enough; and it was no power dive of my making. The cull, Jack, had fallen out of my hands, for no known cause and without warning. Nothing in the book would lift its nose. And I was getting set to step overside when the bust-up came. That is the low-down, Jack."

"Make it the low-down for the higher ups," Jack Washington suggested. "I can get you all the newspaper ears you can talk into; and this is stuff an airman like you should tell the nation."

"But the following, Jack, is stuff I can't tell. And it's the one reason why I don't run out to Sky Harbor Airport and put a foot where even a fishplate wouldn't do C. I. Lagree any good. You see, I had a passenger on that hop."

"I didn't catch that in the papers,"

Washington said, and he began reaching for the lounge's morning editions.

"It isn't there," Penn told him. "The passenger was what you might call a stowaway. At least, he thought he was; but I knew that the kid was in the big rear pit of the LOC when I took off. The would-be stowaway in question was Simon-in-person's own kid, young Ace, so called because, as the chief mac in Lagree's test hangar says, Ace is the ranking twelve-year-old pilot of California and all points north, south, east and west. In other words, Jack, this Ace kid is nuts about flying. Why—would you believe it?—Ace had twenty-three hours and seventeen minutes of air work in his time book when we took off that day. And after I'd yanked him up under the cowling, out of that rear pit, jumped with him in my arms, then set him down on the sand dunes behind El Segundo, or Hermosa Beach, the first thing Ace wanted to know was whether he rated air time for that hop. Hell, Jack, there's an airman in the making. Did he rate air time! I told him he got full time, even air time for the chute drop, and he figured that out. Figured in the forty-three minutes for that hop and drop.

"'Twenty-three hours and seventeen minutes plus forty-three minutes for this trip. Gosh, that just twenty-four air hours!' says Ace."

"I still don't get it," Jack Washington mused. "Don't see why the kid's presence during the doings should put you in line to get, and hold, the dirty end of the stick."

"Boy, are we air guys deep?" Tom Penn grinned. "Look, Jack. It's like this, as you know, Simon-in-person won't go off the ground. He has a true, deep-seated fear of air, yet he lives and waxes rich through and by aviation. In other words, he's willing to send the other fellow up to the sky in ships, but dead sure that he'll take on none of the dangers in person. For an airman like me, Jack, that's—well, oh hell, why argue it?"

"So back to the kid. It's Ace's mother who pays for and sneaks in the flying time for him. I guess Simon-in-person sort of stands aside and tolerates that, just to keep peace in the family so's he can extend all his fighting prowess out among the trade—and very especially against his test pilots. But, as Ace said when we bounced our rubber heels on the dunes, Simon-in-person would surely keep him out of the air after this. For a fact, Jack; the kid was frightened stiff. What—frightened by the crack-up, by the chute jump? Hell no! Frightened stiff that he'd lose out on flying. Jack, I don't know whether you know, but to an airman a thing like that is big. To and for us ordinary lovers of air there's nothing but air. We'll never go to the bank with any of the jack made in aviation, but we'll go to bed every night wishing that it was morning so's we can fly again. You know that. I don't have to tell you. I didn't even dicker a deal on this Canadian job, just now. And you'll pay me a coolie's wage, but I'll go nigger-rich, first pay day, and be happy as a fool on the few bucks. That's us, Jack. And that's this kid Ace. Feller, you just can't understand how that kid has got to me in the few days I've known him."

"Oh, I guess I can," Jack Washington said. "My own folks had a swell, upstanding youngster. Gad how we loved him! Name was John. Later, we called him Jack. Well, so long, and don't wash yourself off this high hill with your own tears."

TOWARD the end of that same week the "Winterkill" studio unit rolled out of Glendale aboard its special train, northbound for the Canadian snows of late September. Same day, with the set purpose of arriving far head of his railroad group, Jack Washington advised Tom Penn that the time had arrived to stop window-sittin', rise and fly. So the BX-3 camera plane winged over the hills and

far away from Hollywood. There's little to tell about the "Winterkill" unit's location stay in Canada that hasn't been told and retold in the movie columns and magazines. In a lot of ways, it was an epic bit of picture making. Anything that Jack Washington undertakes seems to be that. It cost lots of money and furnished some interesting thrill reading for the folks—especially those in Hollywood—who follow such field doings with professional avidity. However, the readers of both North American countries sat up and gave their closest attention when the press and news broadcasts started giving twice—or thrice—daily reports of the progress being made in the far-flung search for the missing camera plane flown by one Pilot Tom Penn, late of Hollywood, now somewhere in the North Canadian wilds.

Jack Washington, it seems, wasn't with Tom Penn when the old BX-3 went lost; but two of Washington's best cameramen were. The intense, well-advertised search went on for a full week; and the wise ones on Hollywood boulevard said, "Does that guy Washington know how to spread the old malarkey, or does he!" Lost. Lost, me eye! Why, the job's all washed up and the troop's on its way south right now.

Right enough, "Winterkill's" troop was on the way home; but Jack Washington and his cameras had dallied in search of those very important snow shots. And Jack had moved north and established new headquarters, better to hire planes and direct the hunt from that point. Well, anyway, an Indian runner finally came out of the north to report that the BX-3 was down—with all three men safe—up on the headwaters of Peace River. The airplane, the runner said, was in a small high meadow; and the bird man would wait there till a new wheel and some gasoline could be packed in.

"How long for the return trip?" Jack Washington asked.

"Five-seven days, with pack load," said the Indian.

"Any more Indians up there?" asked Jack.

"My people, father, mother, two big brother," said the runner.

"Fine!" enthused Washington. "Wind up your motor," he then said to one of his hired search pilots. Next, while the ship was being made ready, he wrote a brief note. The note said, "Give the BX-3 to the Indians, Tom. Hire on the two big brothers to pack your stuff and start walking in this direction—Edmonton. Planes will try keeping eye on you. When you reach first good landing clearing we'll pick you up. Signed: J. W. P.S.: And this Washington wouldn't tell a lie either —you're a hell of a pilot."

So the Indian runner was packed aboard the outgoing ship; and the weighted note was handed to that northwoods pilot with orders to go up there on Peace River and drop said urgent message. And that's how come the studio wrote off one camera plane.

WHEN Producer-director Jack Washington once more went up to the Pacific Wings Club to talk flying business with Tom Penn, that Penn man was once more sitting, with feet in the deeply worn window-sill crescents, gazing out the view-side windows of the high lounge that overlooks all the western sky.

"Sit, Jack; and what's eating you now?" Penn asked.

"Work worms, and lots of 'em," Washington said. "I didn't tell you this before but you babes in the Canadian woods didn't get anything worth-while in the line of snow shots on that last costly hop. 'Winterkill' was all over the cutting-room floor before I fully realized that. But that's not the half of it. 'Winterkill's' nothing short of what I'd call a movie mess, right now. In other and fewer words; it's not up to the fine, super-super standard of the usual run of Washington productions. We're going to work in a skiing sequence.

"Well, anyway, I'm taking the unit back on location, up—"

"Not Canada?" Tom Penn yelled.

"No. Up to Little Crest Lake, here in the San Bernadinos. Plenty of snow up there now, and only a few hours' drive to reach it. Ever been up to Crest Lake?"

"Flown over it a few million times," Tom Penn said. "Plenty rough country back in them there San Bernadino Mountains. Look-a-here, Jack—why can't you change the name of this thing to 'Killwinter' and take the location gang down to Palm Springs to do it?"

"Snow'll make a man of you," Washington said. "And now, how about a camera ship? Got any suggestions?"

Tom Penn pulled both feet back into his chair, scratched his left shin, grinned and said, "Now that you bring the matter up, I have. Remember the LOC job that fell apart on me? Well, as you perhaps know, a producer builds two of each new model, both to be sent to Air Corps' Acceptance Field, one for flight test and the other to be broken down under lead-bag strain. The mate to that one that quit me for the Pacific is still in the back of Lagree Aircraft's test hangar. It's complete, with motor and instruments. Also, it's dusty and more or less in the way, taking up valuable space during these days wherein the aircraft industry, being very busy, is hard put for ample hangar room. In short, Jack, Simon-in-person, might turn loose of that second LOC for a song."

"But we don't want fall-apart camera ships," Jack objected.

"She won't be a go-asunder job with a fishplate on that upper surface. As for her inclination to dive without warning, that's a nasty peculiar to the individual ship, not to the model. Perhaps this second LOC will never try it. I've flown it, you know, and it seemed plenty airworthy. Anyway, we can test that stuff out on a few hops, perhaps, if it shows up when we give the bus a good-shake-down flight. What do you say?"

"You say it. What's the idea?" Washington demanded.

Again Tom Penn grinned and scratched the shin. "It's as kiddish as hell, Jack," he admitted, "but I'd like the satisfaction of jobbing Simon-in-person out of that ship. That is, I'd like to frame the thing so's we'd have old Lee Glab go out to Sky Harbor, pick up this LOC at a junk price, push it out on the deadline and let me hop it away, with Simon-in-person looking on. Now, look; this LOC will make a good ship for the studio. It was designed for camera work. That's what the 'C' stands for—Lagree Observation Camera; and—"

"All right. All right. Have Grab—I mean 'Glab'—buy the thing," Jack Washington decided. "I'll have my sec give you my personal check for whatever you and Glab decide is right, then—"

"—we'll sell it to the studio for what you and I think is exactly nice," Penn thought to add.

"Mr. Penn, you've got something there!" Mr. Washington was quick to enthuse. "We won't be pikers, either. When the deal's all washed up, I'll let the studio publicity give the exact figure to the press. Good fan news; leading studio takes delivery of $25,000 Lagree camera plane from the Tom Penn aircraft agency."

"Boy!" Penn, in turn, enthused. "Simon-in-person Lagree'll go out and buy himself a small, narrow grave so's he can have real grief in turning over in it ahead of time. 25,000 bucks!"

"WINTERKILL'S" unit found plenty snow-back in that Crest Lake region of the San Bernadinos. Crest and Little Crest, being mile-high lakes, were frozen tight as the well-known drum. They're sometimes called the dumb-bell lakes owing to the fact that, lying end to end in their mountain-surrounded setting, the two at times—after the spring

thaws—are connected by a long, narrow neck. Because of this narrow neck, usually filled with drifts and rocks that stand well above the ice, Little Crest Lake enjoys a certain segregation from the more active winter-sports crowd that flocks to Crest. And when a movie unit is out on

location, believe it or not, it desires segregation.

However, snowdrifts and jutting rocks aren't enough to keep kids away when a movie company is in the vicinity; and a great plenty of such young squirts trickled eastward through that long, narrow neck between the overhanging high cliffs that tower far skyward above the dumb-bell's grip. And Tom Penn wasn't on the ice of Little Crest Lake, with the LOC, for more than a few days before he heard this:

"Hi, Tom! Where the heck did you get this LOC?"

Tom had been head-down in the front cockpit, making some sort of an adjustment. He looked overside and said, "Well, if it isn't Ace! How're they breakin', pilot?"

"Aw, quit ribbin' me, Tom," the kid blushed. Then again he asked, "How come you've got Dad's ship up here, Tom?"

By then young Ace had climbed the toeholes and was half hanging inside Tom Penn's pit; and the latter said, "The studio bought it."

"Oh, that's it," Ace said. "Mother and I have been up here at our Crest Lake lodge for the past three weeks, so I didn't hear anything about it. But, gosh, I didn't think you'd be flyin' for Dad!"

"Why not?" Tom Penn grinned.

"Well," the kid said, sort of holding back, "Dad's sore on you, Tom. I've heard him talk. He comes up to the lodge each week-end, you know. Last Sunday some of the Air Corps officers were up from Riverside. Major Bumiller—he's the doctor over here at the Crest Ridge CCC camp—was there for dinner, too. Dad was tellin' them about the LOC that went into the Pacific. He blamed it all on you. Said you were doin' a power dive, without orders. Tom, that made me sore; and I was goin' to stick up for you. I know that Mother was too. But Major Bumiller stuck up for you instead. The major told 'em that he was with you overseas. He told 'em lotsa swell stuff about you, Tom. Two of the other officers said they knew you too. Gosh, they sorta ganged my Dad before they were through with it."

"You say Major Bumiller's over at the CCC camp? Know him well, Ace. He was our flight surgeon in France. He saved my life, Ace. I'll have to run over and tell him hello. But look here: you and your mother don't want to tell any secrets. Never mind sticking up for me. You open your mouth about that crack-up, and zowie!—no more flying for you. And what are you doing about your air work? Not letting this winter-sports stuff ground you, are you?"

"Gosh no!" said Ace. "Mother drives me down to Riverside three days each week. I got thirty-eight hours and forty-six minutes in my time book now. That ain't bad, eh Tom? Say, did you ever do any skiing, Tom?"

"Never did, Ace," Tom Penn answered. "How are you at it?"

"Aw, I'm not so hot," Ace admitted. "But I made the two-mile run yesterday without a toss. That's right down through the timber, Tom; and is it fast! Boy, ya've got to kill off the old flyin' speed,

most of the time, or ya'll take off! Lotsa kids, and some mighty good skiers, get hurt on that two-mile run."

"You can have my share of that air-conditioned, he-man stuff, Ace. I'll take mine in a nice, warm cockpit," Tom Penn said.

Ace, forthwith, forgot skiing with this mention of air work. "How about it, Tom," he asked, "do I get a hop while you're up here?"

"We have a camera hop on right now," Tom said. "Tell you what, though. If your mother says it's O. K., you'll get yours tomorrow morning. How'll that be?"

"Swell. And thanks a lot, Tom. Say, Tom—how much money did the studio pay for this LOC?"

"Twenty-five thousand bucks," Penn answered; and he tried not to laugh. Of course, he didn't say the studio paid Lagree that price.

"Gee, that's funny! $25,000's a lot of money," Ace said. "And this must be the job that my dad was tellin' mother about, 'cause he kept sayin' $25,000! $25,000! But dad seemed mad. That was a week or so ago, Tom. Gosh, I don't know why dad'd be sore about that."

JACK WASHINGTON'S location unit turned out a whole lot of work during the next few days. Much of his time was given over to the skiing sequence which was to bolster some of "Winterkill's" weakness. Then another week-end arrived and Friday and Saturday came across with the coldest, windiest two-days' storm that the San Bernadinos had known in many years. Long before Saturday night, the Crest Lake region was snowbound; and the single highway leading to the valley and the outer world was under anywhere from three to seven feet of snow. So the winter-sporters who were already at Crest Lake were in luck, but it was a case of remaining right there atop the world for the next several days; and as for the thousands of cold-stuff, week-end enthusiasts in the cities below, they'd have to stay below. As for the lakes and their ice, the fifty-mile winds had kept them swept clean as a glazed sea.

Sunday was a sunless day that put a tossing blanket of black clouds right down on the high spots; and though there was little actual snowfall the threat was there and you knew that a great plenty of that white sky dust would be along later. Well, Sunday is always one day of the week when Jack Washington refuses to work the help. So, along toward noon, he and Tom Penn took fowling pieces in hand and went eastward into the stand of high timber at that end of Little Crest Lake, there to see what they might knock over.

By three o'clock the clouds were right down in the trees. It was nearly dark as an ordinary dusk; and snow had begun to fall more frequently, more steadily, more wetly. Now and then Jack and Tom came back to the lake's edge, by means of getting around some rough spot, and when they did so they found that just about all visibility, even on the lake's ice, had been shrunken to a few hundred yards. Something told them that it would be a damned drear afternoon back at East Lodge, where the troop was quartered, so they kept on hunting. Four o'clock came and went; and then five was on their watches. Hunting hadn't been any too good, so Jack Washington suggested, "Let's stay with the noble chase till we bag a full-grown field mouse, at least."

"And to think that grizzlies used to eat pioneers right here in these hills," remarked Penn. "I'd give my rights to your right arm if I could even see—what do I see now? Who's this coming?"

One of the unit's handy men, Grip Goodman, was stumbling in through the timber, coming from the lake. He was hailing and cussin' as he came. "Hi, chief!" yelled Grip. "Been lookin' all over hell an' the devil's other half acre for you men. You're wanted back at the lodge."

"Pull yourself together, my fine man,

and tell me what's what," said Jack Washington.

"Boy! Am I all in?" said Grip, squatting on his heels. "Well, it's this way; seems there's a CCC doctor, a Major Bum —something—"

"Major Bumiller," Tom Penn supplied. "What about him?"

"Well, as I get it, this major is over at Crest Lake, at West Lodge. He called our outfit by phone, and wants you, Penn, to do a flight for him. Seems that one of his punks hit a tree, skiing, an' broke his back. This major guy wants you to fly the guy outa these hills to a hospital. And is that a large-size order, eh?"

It is," Tom Penn agreed. "Let's get back to the lodge."

Half an hour later, arriving back at East Lodge, Tom Penn and Jack Washington found half a dozen members of their group gathered near the clerk's small counter and the lodge's single telephone.

"What's the set-up, Bob?" Jack Washington asked, speaking to his assistant director, Bob Hannigan.

"I didn't get the whole picture, chief," Bob Hannigan told them. "Smithy"—Washington's ace cameraman—"answered the first phone call from West Lodge. Then he went out looking for you two. He should be back any time now. Anyway, as the clerk here got it from Smithy, this medical major at the CCC camp has a young fellow on his hands with a broken back. It seems that the CCC camp has evacuated just about all its men, and all its hospital equipment, to a valley camp for the winter. This doctor guy is up here with a few men just picking up odds and ends; and that's why he can't handle this case with what he can reach. Says he's got to get this kid to a city, or else. And that's with the highway still closed. Smithy tried to argue that a ship couldn't get away in this sky; but the M.D. says, 'You tell Tom Penn that it's an order. Tell him that Major Bum— Something-or-Other says it's an order; and he'll come.'"

TOM PENN turned to the clerk on duty. "Get West Lodge for me," he said. A minute later he was talking to the clerk on duty at West Lodge. Then he hung up, after saying, "No, don't send for him."

"The clerk," he told the waiting group, "says that Major Bumiller has his patient down at the boathouse, waiting for me."

"Waiting for me," he repeated, a few seconds later. "Hell, gang, I'm afraid it'll be a long wait, though, I'd give a right arm to come through for old Bumiller. There's a white gent! Saved my life once, over there.

"But look at that night out there. The bloody sky right down on the ground. Don't imagine there's a break in the blanket this side of the valley. There's enough wet snow in the air to load this wide-winged LOC right down onto the humps before I'd have time to reach the low country. Man, this puts me in a spot!"

"I'll say it does," said a voice; and a group turned to see Smithy coming in through a rear door. "This guy's always puttin' you in a spot, Penn. And by hell if it's got to be somebody's kid I'm glad it's his."

"Whose? What are you raving about, Smithy?" Penn snapped.

"This tight hinge—C. I. Simon-in-person Lagree. It's his kid that bust his back. Skiing, the punk was; and—"

"Call West Lodge again," Tom said to the clerk, "and tell them to start burning gasoline flare-ups down near the boathouse. Tell 'em to make the blazes big. Say that I'm coming."

To Jack Washington he said, "I'll give it a whirl, Jack. Guess we'll cut the buck O. K. Will you see what you can do about getting a few gasoline drums afire west of here in the narrow neck? I'll be going right through there, just off the ice. Let's go, men."

Smithy stood there near the desk as the others started for the door, the lake's ice and the canvas-covered LOC. Smithy was

sort of bug-eyed and open-mouthed. "Ya dam' fool, Penn!" he said. Then, "Say, Penn, wait a shake! I'm goin' to ride that rear pit and help you with this kid."

While Tom Penn and Smithy yanked tarps off the LOC and then removed everything—including both portable stool-seats—from the LOC's long, two-man rear cockpit, Jack Washington and the others roped two full drums of gasoline to the fore and aft bumpers of Jack's car.

"Give us five minutes to get to the neck," Jack finally yelled to Tom, "then five minutes more to roll these drums as far into the narrows as we can go. I'll try to get 'em all the way through so's the blaze will outline both cliffs for you. Then, Tom, just before you're ready to get under way, sound off with a couple rounds from your shotgun. I won't toss a match into the gas till we hear from you. Hi, Smithy—go get Tom's gun."

WITH motor slowly turning, warming, Tom Penn sat in his pit and studied his watch as it counted off minutes. He saw the car's tail-light pass from view into the clouds that still draped right down to the ice. Out ahead there, through that three-quarters of a mile that led to the neck, the going was mighty black. Smithy came back with the shotgun and said, "Say when, Penn."

Ten minutes passed. Tom added a few for good measure. Then "O. K., Smithy. Sound off! And climb aboard."

Smithy timed a slight pause between barrels as he gave the signal; and half a minute later the red glare was mounting in the western sky. In that red glare there was a narrow place between two high, hard cliffs; and Tom Penn, gunning into the night, was on his way for that narrow, hard-sided passage. A minute later, hardly off the ice, the LOC swept over Jack Washington and party, and through.

Tom Penn and Smithy, over the east end of Crest Lake then, looked ahead to something that was mighty hard to face. While the red glare of the fire behind them lit up Crest's east end for a limited distance—which was swell-enough stuff in its quick passing—the black, storm wall of night out ahead showed no sign of flare-ups. No light, not even cabin windows along the shores. Penn knew that Crest is about two miles wide, east and west, from the neck to West Lodge's boathouse. What wind there was was an east wind, right on his tail; and he had made his take-off that way, too—with the breeze on his tail. But now that he faced utter darkness, and two miles of slick, snow-free ice, that wind on his tail was bound to be a great helper for the Fool Killer, provided that said Fool Killer was riding his tail too. Even with brakes set, and the whole works slithering across the ice free as the devil, he'd be hard put to stop the LOC's sliding speed before the length of lake ran out on him. So he had to get that ship right back on the ice. And by the time he made up his mind that no more time could be lost, the helping red glare in the rear had passed away. Tom Penn began to feel for that surface ice, began to ease her down, power reduced to the staggering point, stick in his lap, eyes out in the black where they saw nothing, mouth dry, ears tight, feeling, feeling, feeling, down and down—ah, a little jar, a horsey bounce, and the LOC was on the ice. On the ice, but still slipping, ground-looping, headfirst now, tailfirst next second, plowing ahead with all the wild speed in the world! And Tom Penn wondered where that would end.

Then the sky ahead went red! Through the black, long fingers of flame shot skyward. Again the LOC was pushing forward toward a welcome glow. Penn knew another big relief—the ship was holding to a nose-first rush. He turned to give Smithy a cheer. Smithy wasn't in that rear cockpit! No, Smithy was way back—for he'd gone down the fuselage—and holding onto the rudder; bull-dogging the ship to a stop. Tom Penn killed his motor.

Then he, too, climbed overside, slipped to the ice, on the fly, and joined Smithy. "Thanks for the tail-twisting Smithy!" Penn yelled. "All right now—let her roll a bit. Good. That's jake." And together they had skidded the LOC in, broadside, against the boathouse's icebound float.

"Young feller, that's dockin' her!" an old familiar voice boomed; and Major Bumiller came lumbering through the crowd gathered on the float. "How'ya, Tom Penn? Boy, do you look good to me! Long time no see you, aviator."

For the first time in nearly eighteen years Ex-Lieutenant Tom Penn saluted another man. And when big Major Bumiller slapped the saluting hand down, Penn said, "A salute's a salute, sir, when a man doesn't have to do it. You fat, old son of a seventh son, I've been trying to get over here to see you. Well, I'm taking orders. And you're one of the very few who can give 'em to Penn. Shoot!"

Major Bumiller led Tom Penn aside, away from the press of the interested crowd. He said, "Let's get this thing straight from the hop-off, Tom Penn—you understand this is C. I. Lagree's kid?"

"Why, sure," said Tom Penn. "Young Ace and I are old pals."

Major Bumiller appeared bewildered. "You're one tall, dam' liar, Tom," he said; "but we have no time for that now."

"It's this way: the boy has a broken back. All my hospital equipment was evacuated to the valley camp last Wednesday. And we've got to get the boy to a hospital right away. Just now, I have him out of pain. A local of morphine. He's conscious, and game as a wartime pilot who wants to get out of bed and go back to the front to fly some more. That makes you lift your proud tail, doesn't it, ya old, worn-out ex-aviator?

"Well, if you're all set to go, I'll bring the boy out; and I'll hop along with you."

"The hell you tell!" said Tom Penn. "I'm not going to add your two-fifty pounds of aged ex-manhood to a ship that's going to be plenty heavy with snow before I get out of these mountains. Anyway, I have a swell helper with me, a top-flight cameraman, and he'll take care of young Ace. Let's get going."

"I won't argue. You don't want me," Major Bumiller said; and he and Tom Penn started for the boathouse's door.

INSIDE, resting on the arms of a canoe rack, was a six-foot toboggan. On the toboggan, strapped face down, was young Ace.

"Hi, Tom," the kid said. "Mother—this is Tom Penn."

So Tom Penn met Mrs. Lagree for the first time; and all that Mrs. Lagree could say was said with her eyes. Except that the mother did manage to sob, "Oh, I'm glad you're here, Mr. Penn. And—and for other things—I'm so sorry."

"I'm glad I'm here, Mrs. Lagree," Penn said. "But good Lord, Mother, didn't you hear that Ace and I are going for a hop? All set to rise and fly, Ace?"

"Guess that's the idea, Tom," Ace said. "You say when."

"Now let's get organized," the old soldier that was Bumiller snapped. "Anything that you need, Tom Penn?"

"Yes. Lotsa daylight. Can you furnish it?" Penn shot back.

Major Bumiller stood there at Ace's head and stared at Tom Penn. He stared for a full half minute. "A bit of light wouldn't be a bad idea, Tom," he then mused. "I know you can get off with what light the gasoline fires are furnishing, but should you have to turn back and shoot a

landing, then— Stay here and talk to Ace a minute." Stepping to the door, Major Bumiller barked, "Paine! Orr!"

"Yes, sir! Here, sir!" two of his CCC men answered, from somewhere out front toward the LOC. The old major had a few words with those men. Then, from where he stood inside the boathouse, Tom could see the two CCC men hop into a car and start north across the lake's surface.

Coming back inside, taking his time, Major Bumiller said, "Let's get Ace aboard. We'll have plenty light by the time you're all set. Got an old CCC mess-hall on the far side of the lake. It shouldn't be on the very edge of a pleasure lake—I've just now condemned it for sanitary reasons. You'll see something when the boys touch off that old tinder box. Danged fire-trap, that's what it is.

"All right, Tom Penn; you take the head end. I'll handle the foot. Is this rear pit of yours going to hold this toboggan?"

"Shucks yes," young Ace made known. "It's a special Lagree-Observation-Camera job, Major Bumiller. That back-pit is a two-man pit, isn't it, Tom? It's seven-foot long, eh, Tom?"

"Right, Ace; and the seats are already out," Tom Penn said.

So into the only long, open cockpit of its kind in that section of America, half a dozen strong men elevated the toboggan and young Ace Lagree. And as the kid went overside, then down into the waiting hands of Smithy, the game kid was saying, "Ah, don't cry, Ma. Gosh, I'll be all right. Major Bumiller says it's only a sprained back. Eh, Major Bumiller?"

Suddenly Crest Lake grew brighter and brighter. The black of the night and the clouds of the storm were being driven out. And on the far side of the lake a mighty fire was growing mightier, by the minute. CCC men Paine and Orr had certainly done a quick job of firing on that recently condemned mess-hall.

The major, Tom Penn and Smithy, pulling the cameramen's safety-belt straps from their usual fittings, saw to it that those same straps lashed Ace's toboggan to the floorboards. "Are *you* getting a break, Ace?" Penn kidded. "See, we're getting you in here headfirst, and to one side, so's you can look ahead along my seat and see that I do the flying as it should be done."

"Guess she's jake," the major finally said. "Better get going while that mess-hall is doing its best."

"Get going where?" Penn asked.

"Where do you think—Riverside. March Field. I gave that post a ring. They say there's some clouds and wind, no rain though. I'll call again and make sure that they have an ambulance waiting on the deadline. And say—hop hop back here in the morning and fly me out."

"Is it an order?" Tom Penn asked.

"Nothing else but, soldier!" the major snapped. "And—oh, no, no, Mrs. Lagree—you can't go along. Now—now! Everything is going to be all right. Why, I'd ride through the Holland Tunnel, in a plane, behind Tom Penn. That's the girl!

"O. K., Tom Penn. Take it away!"

Tom Penn eased power to his LOC. Smithy, twisting the big ship's tail, turned its nose around out there on the ice; and then he made his monkey way back up the fuselage and into his pit. Tom Penn was facing into the east wind, with the mess-hall fire abeam his left side, headed once more in the general direction of Little Crest—and the great blackness beyond and above the neck between those cliffs.

A howling rattle, throb and roar filled Crest Lake. The mountains on all sides picked up the mighty commotion, then tossed it back and forth. The LOC's tail was up with the first blast of power. Wheels skidded and slipped on the slick ice. A crazy bounce or two, then Tom Penn plucked that big ship away from the frozen surface with the speed and neatness you'd palm-scoop a fly off a table top. Seconds, only brief seconds of that throbbing climb, and the darkness at the

far end of Crest had claimed Tom Penn and company once more. And in the darkness, just west of the narrow neck, Tom Penn flew a gentle turn, reached back along his right side to put a hand on Ace's head, then swept west with the glare of the mess-hall's blaze glistening on his under surfaces.

Holding to his steady climb, and without flying another turn of the bright lake region, Tom Penn took the hard way and went into the black. His wing-tip lights were lost to those on Crest; and those same wing-tip lights soon marked the absolute limit of visibility for the two men who flew ahead through the storm. Only the few hooded instrument-board bulbs showed Penn the way then, showed him the way by means of their sharp blob on compass, bank-indicator and longitudinal-level. Blind flying. The limited instruments of blind flying. Not too much at best; and mighty little for a work-a-day pilot whose movie and test activities didn't call for such practice. But a good wartime pilot—such as Major Bumiller would say Penn was—could make a pretty good job of blind flying just by watching his compass' float leveling in its liquid bath. His compass! There was the toughest spot in that black night. To begin with, all LOC trouble had started with that compass. Compass interference, caused by the metal fishplate so close to the magnetic field of the compass, had caused C. I. Lagree to order the fishplate taken off. That is, off the first LOC. And now the original metal fishplate was on this second LOC, directly above the compass. And that compass was a crazy thing. Useless.

HOWEVER, never intending to place much hope or faith in that compass, Tom Penn had lined up his flight direction long before the red glare of Crest Lake's big fire had faded behind him. He had lined up the direction as you'd plot your own steps across a familiar dark room; you're here in this doorway, there's a chair there and a table there, and an object on a table—right there where you can put your hand. You walk and do it O. K.

Tom Penn, with eight thousand on his altimeter, and the last of the glow growing very dim, had put that failing light right on his tail—and March Field, Riverside, should be right *there*. Twenty-two, or twenty-three, air miles out front. So, holding the 8000-foot elevation, enough altitude to keep him just clear of the highest humps in that stretch of the San Bernadinos, he plowed clouds for ten minutes by the clock on his board. Ten minutes. That should have given him the sea of lights that is the big city of San Bernadino, in the foothills of the range. But San Berdu's sea of lights wasn't there; not for Tom Penn. No lights. Not even an occasional string of pearly auto headlights on the network of fine, much-traveled highways that laces the lowlands in all directions. Too much cloud below. Eight thousand feet of solid clouds, perhaps. Wonder whether or not there is a bottom to the cloud blanket, Tom Penn wondered. But Penn had to make his gamble. He had to go down, had to bring some lights up to him if they wouldn't break through of their own free will. So he dropped some of the flying speed, lowered his ship's nose and dropped some of the altitude, dropped his head deep into the pit—better to talk to Ace—and yelled, "How's that for hitting it on the nose, Ace? Notice the glide? Sliding down into March. Won't be long now!"

But Tom Penn wasn't kidding himself. He never thought for a second that he had March field ahead; but here was one place where it was no sin to tell a lie.

Throttled low, gliding her flat as the devil, he watched the altimeter's indicator sluff off feet by the hundred, by the thousand. Seven thousand. Six. Five. Well, he must be out of the foothills. Fifteen minutes of flight had been put behind. But never a single sign of lights. Clouds still tossing past the wing-tip riding lights.

The propeller still whirling its disc of dull silver glow. Mist whipping back in his face. And Smithy yelling, "'At's flyin', Penn! Hittin' it right on the button! See those March floodlights!" Just another willing liar hanging from a big rear pit.

Four thousand on the altimeter. Then thirty-five hundred. Let's see, thought Tom Penn, isn't this upsweep to the foothills all pretty high mesa? Isn't the general run of land around here something like three or four thousand feet above sea level? Was he going to fly into the ground without ever seeing that ground!

Tom Penn came out of his glide. Power was back on his nose. He was flying that LOC then, flying it right in his lap. All eyes. All ears.

Then it came out of the night! All the floodlights of big, mile-square March Field! And right down there, dead ahead.

Smithy was yelling; and actually shaking the ship. And Penn was bellowing a song, off key, and doing a jig on his pedals. Not only was March Field down there with all its lights, but the cloud blanket had ended, standing up behind them, high as they could see, like the Great Wall of China, transplanted, and grown taller. Just once in a lifetime men sail through like that, and that once is enough and plenty. Why, you wouldn't want luck—or call it what you will—to deal that hand again and again, to the point of monotony.

"Going in for a landing, Ace," Tom Penn yelled, as he cut back his power for a long glide.

SO THE medics X-rayed young Ace while Tom Penn and Smithy looked on. Then they beefed the kid up in the long canvas stocking; and stretched him to the ceiling. Of course, young Ace was in that pink, floaty land of slumber by then. And finally, a pair of highly expert hands performed just a few second's work at the small of Ace's very small back; and the break was set. "The kid," said the owner of the expert hands, "will be better than ever, up and out hitting more and larger trees, before the winter season is over.

"When can you see him? Oh, in the morning. He'll be out of the smoke by then."

Southern Californian skies were laughing next morning, and that went for the sky back over the San Bernadinos, too. So Tom Penn and Smithy hopped back to Crest Lake. An hour later, Tom Penn was back in the air with Major Bumiller and Ace's mother in the big rear pit.

C. I. Lagree had arrived at March Field during the night. He was just coming out of Ace's room when Tom Penn and company arrived in the anteroom. C. I. was a pretty badly crushed man when he took his wife in his arms. You'd guess that C. I. had taken some sort of a beating during the past several hours. Finally Major Bumiller and the mother went in to see Ace. C. I. put out a hand and caught Penn's arm.

"I'm not going to try to say what should be said, Penn," C. I. began. "I'm leaving that to Mrs. Lagree. I think she can handle it best. I've just had a talk with Ace. He told me about the first LOC job. Everything. All's I can say, Penn, is that I've learnt to eat humble pie. You won't believe this, but the stuff's not bitter.

"Well, anyway—eh, you—"

"Forget it, C. I. Forget it," Tom Penn said. "Let's go in and see the patient."

And young Ace said, "Hi, Tom. Boy, was that a hop last night, eh. Ya hit March right on the nose. Say, Tom, how long were we in the air?"

"Oh-o!" Tom Penn laughed. "He wants air time for last night's hop. Well, why not? Let's see, Ace. I think we were in the air just a little longer than fifteen minutes. Call it that."

"Let's see," Ace figured. "I have 38 hours and 46 minutes in my time book; 46 plus 15. Let's call it fourteen minutes, Tom; and that'll make 39 hours even."

The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Old Timers Are His Pet Weakness

WHEN, in the Caddo Cameron story that leads off this issue of SHORT STORIES, Moonshine declared himself, "Any fight is my fight," the old cuss said a mouthful; for he sounded the slogan or voiced the philosophy of a class of men who had lived and fought on the world's frontiers since the Year One. History has made heroes of some, and ignored others; but—whether hero or unknown—to the last man those pugnacious fellows have made history.

"Although these fighting men were native to many lands," writes Caddo Cameron, "in my humble opinion America has produced the most picturesque and likeable ones of the lot. True, the Old World adventurers often had it on our boys as far as polish was concerned. Our American trouble hunters didn't dress in silks and satins, pack mandolins, and serenade beautiful ladies in castle towers. Mostly they wore buckskin, homespun, jeans, or broadcloth, packed an assortment of tomahawks, knives, pistols, long guns, and six-shooters, and serenaded gals in wigwams and honkatonks, or the equivalent. But in their homely way, they were just as romantic, valiant, and chivalrous as the best of the others: furthermore, we understand them a heap better than we do their foreign prototypes.

"It's too daggoned bad that biographers don't always give those old boys a break. Most of us alternately laugh and cuss while reading after some conscientious biographer who sweats, and strains, and struggles in an effort to discover gloriously patriotic or highly moral motives with which to actuate a cantankerous subject who persists in sticking his nose into trouble. These biographers would have us to believe that the old timer got into the mess as a result of his burning love of law and order, or an overpowering anxiety to hasten the advance of civilization.

"Pure goo, nine times out of ten.

"There's no sense in kidding ourselves. If any one of those grand old fighters had such a powerful thirst for law and civilization, why didn't he hit the trail for the East where they had plenty of it on tap? And when it got sort of tame in his immediate locality, why does he let us catch him easing himself out of the picture and pointing his pony's snout plumb away from law and order?

"Regardless of what he may say when mellowed by age, or what his hard-working biographer may write about him—facts indicate that mighty nigh every time he landed smack in the middle of a ruckus, it was because he dived in head first or made it a point to edge over so close he was bound to get tangled in the fracas.

"Nature made him that way and she gave him his motto, 'Any fight is my fight!'

"Those old timers are my pet weakness. I like 'em; and I like 'em best as they really were—wild, tough, raw, and at times savage, but generally untouched by one of our greatest human ailments—hypocrisy. As Americans, I think we should be proud of them; and as an individual, I'm mighty proud of those whose names appear in our family Bible.

"But they're aggravatin' scalawags. One of them usually busts his way into my

In the next issue

Short Stories

for April 25th

Three long novelettes—and each one by a favorite author among the fans—

In the South American Jungles

The Castle of Lost Men

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Along Halfaday Creek

Black John Applies the Golden Rule

JAMES B. HENDRYX

New York Racketeers

The Finger of the Dead

WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

Also The conclusion of the Red Clark serial, a Baldy Sours yarn, a Northern by H. S. M. Kemp and many others

story and I have a devil of a time keeping him from running away with the show, just as he did in real life whenever he busted into a show.

"Caddo Cameron."

Nyes and Gaggles

IN L. Patrick Greene's story in this issue, "Blank Charge," the author mentions that the Major and Jim came upon a "pride" of lions. We thought this must be a type error, but looked the word up in the dictionary. Sure enough, there it was—pride, meaning a number of animals, such as lions.

From that point we began some research into this matter of expressions used to denote a number of any sort of animal. Herd of cattle, flock of sheep, school of fish, swarm of bees, and even covey of quail—those were common enough, and easy. But we discovered that there were an amazing number of these words—most of them from huntsmen's terminology from the middle ages. Here are some we dug up, and if any reader can contribute more, we shall be very glad to print them:

cete of badgers
skulk of foxes
singular of boars
sounder of swine
nye of pheasants
gaggle of geese
badling of ducks
fall of woodcock
wisp of snipe

Jetty Whacker

JOHN HAWKINS makes his first appearance in this SHORT STORIES, and since his story was about jetties and the men that make them, we asked Mr. Hawkins to tell us something about himself and the men of which he writes. And the following interesting letter was the result:

"Jetties? Sure, I'd heard of them, seen them too. Long piles of rock that ran out into the ocean—that's all they meant to me. I'd heard of the Eiffel Tower too, but I hadn't worried much about how they hung the steel.

"But Jetties. I went, I saw, and I was glad to get a transfer. Ol' Lady Pacific can really dish it out, and she's organized to get tougher than any bull-neck on the job.

"The jettywhackers have their own stories. Bunkhouse yarns, some true, some fiction, but most of them good.

"There's the one about the Swede engineer whose locomotive jumped the track and went, nose-first, in twenty feet of nice salty water. The train crew did some frantic swimming, and when they counted noses on the trestle the Swede was still missing. They waited, and watched and it seemed hours before he popped up.

His stay bothered the boys, and one of them asked, "What kept you so long?"

"'I yust went back," the big guy said, "to turn off the inyector.'"

"Which isn't a bad gag if you know steam engines. He had, so the story goes, gone back to shut off the valve that puts water in the boiler.

"Then there's the yarn about the new Super, and this one I know is true. He saw a storm coming up after the crew had come in and left the pile driver rig 'out front.' So he climbed on a speeder and went out to see if it was safe. He went alone—just at dark—over five miles of spray soaked track, hunched down against the rising wind.

"The pile driver was all right—the crew had done a good job on the tie-down—but a swell washed the speeder off the track as soon as the Super left it. He was marooned out there, cut off by swells that broke over the jetty track, alone with the pile driver rig five long miles from shore.

"It wasn't much of a storm, but it lasted three days, and the Super spent that time in the pile-driver cab. The cab glass had long since been broken out and he was wet down plenty by the water that poured through the windows.

"That three days was anything but funny to the Super. He was blue with cold, numb and shivering when they found him, but he still had strength enough to curse the foreman who left the rig out front instead of taking it back to the shelter of land.

"Another time a new contractor laid three miles of nice new pipe between the rails, from the water tank at sand to the jetty end. The engineer told him he'd better use plenty of pipe straps, one about every fifth tie, if he had any ideas about keeping his pipe.

"And what the contractor told that engineer. Didn't the so-and-so slide rule hound know that pipe straps cost money? Didn't he know that one strap every fifty feet was plenty? Didn't he know enough to mind his own business?

"He did. The engineer said exactly nothing, and went back to his office and waited. Ol' Lady Pacific was a bit slow this time, it was a whole month before she got around to taking care of that pipe. A mid-summer blow plucked the pipe, two inch cast iron stuff, cleanly from its resting place, tied it in neat knots and scattered it from hell to breakfast. The next batch was really strapped down.

"And again a new Super, the contractor's son this time, fresh from college with a diploma that gave him everything but a respect for Ol' Lady Pacific. He decided to make an inspection trip at the wrong time. He was doing all right till one of the swells came a bit higher than the rest, caught the speeder, lifted it off the rails and then dropped it back. The Super wasn't exactly sure what happened after that, but he came back on his hands and knees. He crawled, when the sea would let him, and the rest of the time he clung, face down, to the ties and prayed. He lost his front teeth when a swell hammered his face against a tie, and he had a couple of ribs broken. But he learned—and he's tops as a jettywhacker now.

"The rock train crews have a real job too. The granite comes from an inland quarry on flat cars, and their problem is simply to get that rock placed around the trestle. They do, but, man, it's a tough way to earn your biscuits.

"Here they use a baby steam shovel, and the track spread of this shovel is only six inches narrower than the top of the flat cars. The way the shovel runners ramble that baby rig along the rock train is enough to do something to you, plenty. Some of the boulders weigh more than the shovel, and sometimes they have to cable the car down to keep it from going into the sea too.

"I rode with one of those runners one day when he was hurrying to finish so he and the crew could go to a ball game. Me, I did a lot of thinking about the climate in the hereafter. I've seen shovel runners, plenty of them, but none like that—before or since. It was a wide-open ride with the rig standing on its nose and then slamming back so hard it bounced. Looking into the sea first on one side then on the other.

"The fireman grinned when I asked him how he managed to stay on the job like that. He pointed to a bolt on the fire-box door. 'See that? When Jerry's goin' I watch that, and nuthin' else.'

"I tried it. It was like riding in a cracker box that was being bounced around like a football, but as long as I kept my eyes on the bolt I couldn't see the things that started my stomach dancing. The next time I'll watch the job from a distance—the way an inspector should.

"One of the jettywhackers had a brain storm during the chain letter craze. He started his own chain using pints of jackass whiskey instead of dimes. That chain was a success—the job was down for two days *"John Hawkins."*

Real Trade Heads

AND here's a letter from our good friend, Captain Fred Moore:

"My *Trade Heads,* which you ran recently in SHORT STORIES, may have seemed to some of your readers as fanciful invention, it being a story based on the idea that if head hunters had a substitute for real heads, they would stop taking the real ones.

"The attached clipping, from a recent New York *Times,* shows that head hunting can be checked by taking a new viewpoint on the problem—the same problem discussed in *Trade Heads:*

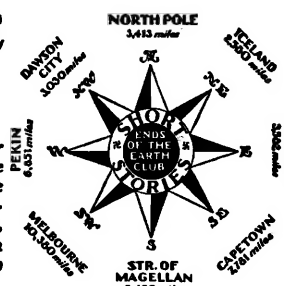
OLD SKULLS SAVE LIVES

The "wild man of Borneo," the savage head-hunter whose trial law once commanded him to produce the head of an enemy as a proof of manhood, has been transformed into a peaceful citizen.

Head-hunting has been forbidden by the government, and strangely enough the tribes are conforming to the law without protest, states J. R. Lloyd, Manila manager of the American Express Travel Service, mainly because the government has realized the importance of the head, which was not only a war trophy, but an addition to the household; because the native believed that the size of his family was greatly increased by each new capture.

Some substitute, therefore, had to be found for the custom, which claimed a yearly sacrifice of thousands of lives. A new ceremony was finally invented by an ingenious settler, at which, after elaborate and lengthy ritual, old skulls which are kept numbered and registered by the government, are brought out as symbols. Massacres are averted, and every one is happy.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, c/o Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Think of having this view to look at every day of the year.

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading SHORT STORIES for as many years as I can remember and the only thing I can say about it is that it's great.

I have traveled a lot over the United States, South America, nearly all islands in the Caribbean, and all of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador to Hudson Bay.

I have changed jobs more times than I can write about. I am now caretaker of The Trading Post, a tourist outpost for information in the summer and a lodge for dancing and private parties in the winter. It overlooks the gorge of the world's famous Reversing Falls and a very interesting place, I can assure you.

My hobbies are writing, reading good fiction, and collecting knicknacks. I have a few stamps of Nigeria which I will send to the first one interested who

writes me a long letter. They were given to me by a missionary from there.

Hoping the readers of this keep me busy writing, I am

Yours sincerely,

Berton A. Worden

144 Carmarthen Street,
Saint John,
New Brunswick,
Canada

Prospector—trapper—fisherman—fruit picker—what next?

Dear Secretary:

I have been reading SHORT STORIES for years and years, and seldom miss a copy as I think it's the best magazine on the market.

I've never written to you as for the past six years I've always been on the go. I've prospected all over British Columbia and the Olympics of Washington. I've trapped all along the Smokey and Wapiti Rivers and Great Bear Lake in Canada, picked fruit along the West coast, traveled through every state of the U.S.A., and was superintendent of a large apartment house in New York City. At present I'm living on my own cruiser and figuring to go on a fishing and prospecting trip to Alaska in the spring. I might even stay for a trapping season.

I would like to swap letters with anybody from anywhere.

Yours truly,

Val Rilling

107 Edgar Street,
Seattle,
Washington

I'll bet he doesn't know how many members have this same hobby!

Dear Secretary:

I would like to join the Ends of the Earth Club.

I have only read a few copies of SHORT STORIES, but have enjoyed them, and have found the departments very interesting.

My hobby is photography, and if there are any persons having the same hobby, I would be pleased to hear from them.

Here's wishing SHORT STORIES continued success.

Very sincerely,

Charles Collingridge

110 Duke Street, South,
Guelph,
Ontario,
Canada

Who served at Camp Lewis during 1920 and 1921?

Dear Secretary:

It was a real pleasant surprise for me to receive a bunch of American magazines from a doctor friend of mine. A copy of your famous SHORT STORIES was among them, and believe me, I have been a constant reader of it ever since.

I am a Nicaraguan citizen, born and raised in this country from Spanish descent. Due to the fact that I served an enlistment in the United States army several years ago, I read, write and speak the English language fairly well.

I was an enlisted man in Camp Lewis, Washington, during 1920 and 1921, and was on duty over there with the Fourth Engineers, Company A. I was previously detailed to the Recruits Educational Center which was established at that camp for the purpose of training men for the service. I am particularly interested in corresponding with some of my ex-comrades at Camp Lewis and with the Marines who were in Nicaragua on duty.

I should also like to exchange postcards, magazines, pictures, and souvenirs with friends in all parts of the world, and especially in the U.S.A.

Very truly yours,

Louis E. Salazar

Jinotepe,
Carazo,
Nicaragua,
Central America

HEY GANG!

Start Now to Clear up your Skin! Make yourself a Good Dancer! *WIN POPULARITY!*

DON'T MISS THIS!

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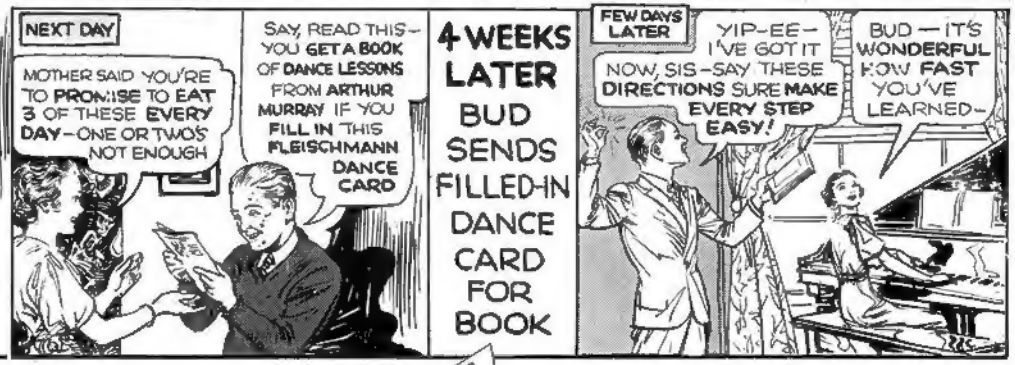
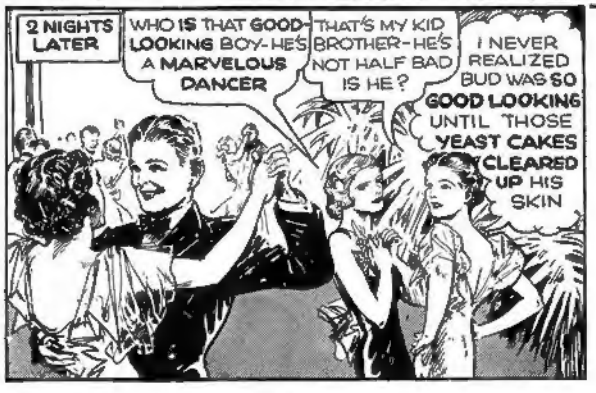
-The World's Greatest Dancing Instructor-

FREE!

YOU'D PAY $5 EACH PRIVATE LESSON TO LEARN THESE STEPS AT ARTHUR MURRAY'S NEW YORK STUDIO

SURE WISH I KNEW WHY MARY TURNED DOWN MY BID FOR THE PROM
BUD - YOU'LL HAVE TO GET RID OF THOSE HICKIES — IF YOU WANT TO CUT ANY ICE WITH MARY-
THEN BUD GETS A TIP
SAY, MA - ISN'T THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO ABOUT THESE?
BUD, I HEARD FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST IS FINE TO CLEAR UP PIMPLES. YOU JUST EAT 3 CAKES EVERY DAY


NEXT DAY
MOTHER SAID YOU'RE TO PROMISE TO EAT 3 OF THESE EVERY DAY - ONE OR TWO'S NOT ENOUGH
SAY, READ THIS - YOU GET A BOOK OF DANCE LESSONS FROM ARTHUR MURRAY IF YOU FILL IN THIS FLEISCHMANN DANCE CARD
4 WEEKS LATER BUD SENDS FILLED-IN DANCE CARD FOR BOOK
FEW DAYS LATER
YIP-EE - I'VE GOT IT
NOW, SIS - SAY THESE DIRECTIONS SURE MAKE EVERY STEP EASY!
BUD — IT'S WONDERFUL HOW FAST YOU'VE LEARNED-


2 NIGHTS LATER
WHO IS THAT GOOD-LOOKING BOY - HE'S A MARVELOUS DANCER
THAT'S MY KID BROTHER - HE'S NOT HALF BAD IS HE?
I NEVER REALIZED BUD WAS SO GOOD LOOKING UNTIL THOSE YEAST CAKES CLEARED UP HIS SKIN

ASK YOUR GROCER FOR THIS FREE FLEISCHMANN DANCE CARD

Don't miss this CHANCE to get your ARTHUR MURRAY Dance Book. Learn the new steps. Make yourself the best dancer in your crowd! Pictures... diagrams make every step *easy*.

This book is NOT FOR SALE. The ONLY WAY to get it is with Fleischmann Yeast Labels! Paste these on the Fleischmann Dance Card your grocer will give you. Send it in—the dance book is yours!

If there are no Dance Cards at your grocer's, you can still get the book by pasting the 81 yeast labels on a sheet of paper, or putting in an envelope, and mailing with your name and address to Fleischmann's Yeast, 701 Washington St., New York City. (This offer holds good until August 31, 1937.)

(Details of securing Dance Book differ slightly in states West of Denver and in Canada, see newspapers or ask your local grocer.)

"STICK TO IT—and **FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST** will help to clear up **ADOLESCENT PIMPLES,"** says Dr. R. E. Lee, well-known physician **Important glands develop after the start of adolescence. The entire body is disturbed. The skin gets oversensitive. Waste poisons in the blood irritate this sensitive skin—pimples break through! Fleischmann's Yeast helps correct pimples by clearing these skin irritants out of the blood. Eat *3 cakes* daily —one about ½ hour before meals —plain, or in water. Start now!**

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"Why I choose Camels...."

NAT'L OPEN GOLF CHAMPION, record-smashing *Tony Manero,* says: "I had healthy nerves and good digestion on my side. Naturally I would. I'm a hearty Camel smoker. 'For digestion's sake—smoke Camels' hits the ball right on the nose."

SPUNKY, GLOBE-CIRCLING REPORTER, *Miss Dorothy Kilgallen.* She carried Camels on her dash around the world. "I ate all kinds of food—snatched meals anywhere," she says, "but smoking Camels helped to keep my digestion tuned up."

SIR HUBERT WILKINS, knighted for his scientific feats in both the Arctic and Antarctic, says: "Where I've gone, Camels have gone. Camels are my stand-by. I find Camels add gusto to my meal—even if it's pemmican and dry biscuit."

JUNGLE EXPLORER, *Lawrence T. K. Griswold,* has headed expeditions to Tibet, Komodo, The Amazon, Africa. His experience: "Eating in the jungle is no picnic. I look forward to the sense of digestive ease that smoking Camels brings me."

TUNE IN Every Tuesday

"Jack Oakie's College"—a full hour show with Jack Oakie in person! Benny Goodman's "Swing" Band! George Stoll's Concert Orchestra! Hollywood comedians and singing stars! Special college talent! Tuesdays—9:30 p m E.S.T., 8:30 p m C.S.T., 7:30 p m M.S.T., 6:30 p m P.S.T., over WABC-Columbia Network.

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"CAMELS SET ME RIGHT"—STEADY SMOKERS SAY